

INTELLECTUAL MANSIONS, S.W.



*By the Same Author*

THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD. 7/6

CUSTODY OF THE CHILD. 3/6

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE. 3/6

VENETIAN LOVERS. 3/6

OLIVER'S KIND WOMEN. 3/6

HELEN OF LANCASTER GATE. 3/6

BACK TO LIFE. 3/6

London : HUTCHINSON & CO.

# *Intellectual Mansions,*

*S.W.*

::

::

A NOVEL

By *PHILIP GIBBS*

::

::

::

---

*cat*

*SECOND EDITION*

*LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.  
PATERNOSTER ROW*



cat

Acc. no: 1440



cat

# Intellectual Mansions, S.W.

## CHAPTER I

"My dear," said John le Dreux (staring first at a red lamp above the railings of a corner ground-floor flat in Royal Avenue, Lavender Park, and then at two hansom cabs, racing from opposite directions and colliding with a terrific clatter of hoofs, nose to nose, under a balcony from which a maid-servant had been whistling shrill blasts; and then at a girl in white muslin, who had one hand on his arm and her face upturned to a great block of mansions from every window of which came a soft gleam of light into the shimmering half-darkness of a summer evening)—"my dear," said John le Dreux, after these three deliberate and leisurely glances, "for what purpose we have left the old home up north to come into this extraordinary street and among all these queer people in South London is a riddle which, as far as I am concerned, is still unsolved."

"My dear John," said the girl in white muslin, who had been taking an immense interest in the view, through the railings, of the interior of the ground-floor flat which was brightly illumined by electric light, "you were always a duffer at riddles. We have come down here to get away from those good but frightfully stupid people of whose habits, houses, business, private scandal, and physical ailments, we knew everything there was to know since childhood, having inherited the knowledge as a family tradition. We have come down here"—she paused for a moment, clasping her light skirts more tightly and gazing with a kind of eagerness down the long line of mansions facing the park with all their gleaming window-panes—"to get into a new life, to meet new people, to broaden our poor little, narrow, provincial brains and hearts by a wider outlook upon this immense world of London"—again she paused and looked away over the park, now dark and silent, above which was the rosy,

glamorous radiance of London by night—"and among other things to give you a chance of making a name for yourself instead of being buried alive in a Yorkshire valley where nobody has any interesting disease . . . all of which, John, I have said a hundred thousand times."

John le Dreux laughed quietly, lit a cigarette, threw away the match, watched it burn itself out on the pavement, and then said:

"Yes, I have heard all that before, little sister. I dare say we shall have some adventures, and I hope you will get lots of fun. They are a queer set in this street."

He whistled, a good, clear, bird-like whistle; and a rough sheep's dog came bounding from the darkness into the pool of light thrown from an electric standard, and pawed up at him.

"Cory! Poor old Corydon! I know one fellow who will miss the Yorkshire moors and dales . . . well, let's turn in and have that meal, and pull down the blinds from such an indecent exposure of our brand-new furniture."

This young man, John le Dreux (described as M.D., Edin., on the brass plate under the red lamp), was a tall, lean, straight-backed fellow with a tanned, clean-shaven face, and hazel-brown eyes which seemed used to longer distances of vision than those in London. He went slowly, with the girl in white at his side, under the archway of the block of mansions. At the entrance the girl unlinked her arm and took a last look up and down the street.

"It's fascinating!" she said in an excited voice. "To think of all these people, all of them interesting, all of them in the swirl of London, living, working, playing their parts in the big drama! There must be a story worth knowing in every one of those flats. . . . Oh, I shall not be satisfied until I get into the heart of it all!"

"God send me some of them as patients—or victims," said John le Dreux, smiling down into his sister's face, into those big brown liquid eyes which he called "saucers" when he was in a teasing mood.

"Oh, they are sure to be delightfully neurotic," said the girl. "I expect some of them take drugs and things. I shouldn't be surprised if you get a murder or two, *crimes passionelles*, don't you know. That would be rather jolly for you, wouldn't it? Splendid advertisement!"

"Heartless minx," said John le Dreux; but by the way



in which he tucked the girl's arm in his, in a good comradely way, it seemed that he could trust her heart as far as he was concerned.

As they went into the vestibule of Prince's Mansions a pair of light heels came click-clacking down the stone steps which led up, flight after flight, towards heaven and the topmost flat; and to the staccato of this accompaniment a girl's voice trilled out a bar or two of Mendelssohn's "Minnelied." She took the last flight with a swish of skirts, two steps at a time, and as John le Dreux fumbled for his latch-key in every one of his fourteen pockets he glanced over his shoulder at the figure of a dainty creation in rose-pink silk, with a bare neck and arms, and a bit of filmy lace over a fluffy head of hair, rather ghostly in the darkness of the last flight of stairs, but cheering and alluring as she stepped into the light of the hall lamp. She turned her head towards the two figures outside the door of the ground-floor flat, and in that moment John saw that she had a pretty neck and smiling eyes, which flashed into his as she passed. She went outside and called "Hansom!" in a clear treble, and then whistled with a boyish note as though for a dog. But a clatter of hoofs proved that the sound had reached the rank fifty yards away.

"I expect she's an actress or something," said Madge le Dreux.

"Certainly something," said John. "Now, where the deuce is that key?"

He found it and passed it into the lock just as there was a click of the latch in the door of the flat opposite, which opened and revealed a youngish man in evening-dress, who opened his opera hat with a little bang as he came out into the hall. He, too, looked towards the figures in the doorway facing him—his opposite neighbours—staring at the girl deliberately. He was a tall, dark young man, with black hair which bunched out on each side of his white clean-shaven face, and he carried a thing which in the darkness looked like a baby's coffin, but was merely a 'cello case.

"Musician," said Madge le Dreux, peeping after him curiously; and her brother said, "Good guess—and he looks the part, by Jove!"

"I wish he would take me with him," said the girl. "I wonder where he is going to play? I say, John, let's go to the theatre or somewhere to-night. Let us taste some of

the joys of London life. Let us do something dreadfully dissipated, and stay out till the small hours."

"Is that how you feel?" said John le Dreux (M.D., Edin.), in a doubtful way as though such dissipation did not tempt him. Then he drew his sister into the little square hall and shut the door after her.



## CHAPTER II

It was not the first time that John le Dreux had shut the door, in the mystical sense of protection, after his sister Margaret. She had complained, sometimes peevishly, sometimes passionately, sometimes with her black eyebrows closely knitted, and with anger glowing in her big brown eyes, that he had closed the gates of life deliberately against her and shut up her soul—"her wretched little mouse of a soul," as she called it—within the narrow walls and in the dim light of a provincial prison-house. She did not use those very words, but she had expressed her meaning in quite vigorous imagery for which she was never at a loss.

John had said, "My dear old Kid, don't get hysterical," and, "Why can't you be happy where you are?" But after saying these things once in three months or so for nearly five years, he had ended, quite recently, by saying, "All right, have it your own way, Meg Merriles (that was his most comradely name for her). I suppose it would be selfish of me to hang on here. But it will be a great bother to take the plunge, don't you think?"

Madge took most of the bother upon her own shoulders; superintended the sale of furniture—too old to be beautiful, and too new to be valuable to the collector (it was mostly early Victorian)—and, coming to London with her brother who looked on with quiet amusement and without assuming any airs of command or criticism, fixed up the flat at Lavender Park and spent the most thrilling and joyous days in choosing wall-papers, china, glass, and "new art" suites (cheap and highly artistic, though somewhat frail after solid mahogany), leaving gaps to be filled up on further adventures in the "antique" shops of Chelsea and the Fulham Road.

Already it seemed to the brother and sister now, after sitting on their new chairs for a week, that the old life at Swalebridge in Yorkshire was far behind them, no longer part of themselves, but a memory to be talked about in the

past tense. Madge le Dreux spoke of it scornfully, as a thing well done with, John with a lingering regret as of good days with which it had been a pity to break. Not so active nor so nimble of wit as his sister, whose restless brain was quick to seize upon any knowledge within reach, and whose heart yearned for fuller and stronger emotions than had come within her experience of life, John had a deliberate quiet kind of wisdom which saw further, and struck deeper, and it is probable that having searched his own heart in loneliness—for he had been very much alone—and having studied his sister, rather wonderingly and anxiously sometimes, he had known that for both of them safety was better than adventure, and a quiet country life, however dull the daily round, more profitable than the thrill and struggle of London. In the early days ambition had called to him. Sometimes his pride had been stung when he had seen how fellow-students were earning good money and good names, while he, of whom they had prophesied big things, was getting deeper into the ruck of a pettifogging provincial practice. But generally these pricks of pride were followed by a shrug of the shoulders and, "After all, what does it matter?" and in a year or two he was settled in the ruck, and the idea of getting out of it was so blunted that it would never spur him out.

"I'm a lazy devil, and that's the truth of it," said John le Dreux, and he knew himself pretty well.

Yet laziness was not all the truth about it, or about John le Dreux. He might have allowed something to himself on the score of unselfishness. It was that which had held him more than anything, in the early days at Swalebridge when he had not forgotten to be ambitious, and it was that, wholly, which had brought him to London, because Madge had set her heart on it, though he hated the idea.

His father had been one of the two doctors of Swalebridge for forty years, being himself the son of the veterinary surgeon or "horse-leech" as Carlyle would have called him, and the descendant, through many generations of decadent fortunes, of Jean le Dreux, Duc de Bretagne, and this, that, and the other, when Norman William gave him honours and lands in England, among which were the Earldom of Swalebridge and the Castle, whose grey old ruins and towering keep still dominated the heights above the grey little town, straggling down the hillside to the river Swale, which came tossing and tumbling from the



moors with many swift falls and with many twistings and turnings, over the big loose boulders and slabs of limestone. Other noble families had held the Castle for six centuries, and the name of le Dreux was remembered only by the authors of the local guide books, and other more learned antiquarians, and by those who had been brought into the world, cured of childish complaints, healed of broken limbs, attended, often through a lifetime, without a penny piece of payment, by the sturdy man who was John's father, and afterwards by John himself.

When his father died—and there were many Yorkshire men and women and bairns who wept, quite unashamed of tears, when his body was lowered to the grave—John had just taken his degree of M.D. at Edinburgh (to which University he had gone for economy's sake), and it was a natural thing that he should succeed to his father's practice, though it was worth at the most £200 a year. It was a natural, in John's opinion the only right, thing to do, though he had the offer of becoming house-surgeon at Edinburgh. His mother was left alone in the old house in Newbiggin at Swalebridge, and longed for her son. To her Swalebridge was the centre of the world, and all her happiness—except John and the husband for whom she now mourned—was there.

The "old doctor," as John's father was still called in the hill-town and the dales beyond, had brought her to Swalebridge thirty-five years before, as a girl of nineteen and in the first flush of a beauty which to the last marked her out among women. Although she had come from the south, the daughter of a Warwickshire clergyman, the Yorkshire people took her to their hearts, and Swalebridge had been very proud of their doctor's wife and pointed her out to strangers. In those early days, before John and Madge were born, Alice le Dreux had been a rather disturbing possession to the young Yorkshire doctor, who loved her with a kind of hungry, gnawing, jealous love, which made him wolf-like and savage when any other male being came within reach of her smiling eyes and of the laughter which came rippling like liquid music from her full white throat. There were men even in a quiet old Yorkshire town, perched upon a hill and off the track of the highroads, who envied Dr. le Dreux his wife, and who dared to claim the ordinary neighbourly share of her beauty. She did not discourage them. She was quick to give her smiles; for instance to



the young squire who was now the old squire—and still unmarried said the Swalebridge folk, because Alice le Dreux was a wife. Sometimes she had gone out walking with him along by the river, through the tangled woods, across the stiles and up to the hill-tops, while Dr. le Dreux was feeling the pulses of old women in grey old cottages, or helping other women's babies into the world in the lonely farmsteads on the moors.

Once he had met his wife sitting with Richard Courcy in Arthur's Oven, a cavern in the rocks above the Swale where many lovers had made their first vows. Whispers went about when young Squire Courcy was found with a bullet wound between his ribs, stark and white on the green turf of one of his own meadows, with the young doctor, grey-white also as a dead man, but very quiet and cool and with a steady hand, bending over him and probing for the bullet. Jock, a farmer's boy, now a farmer himself with fourteen children, had sworn a thousand times in the sanded parlour of the Castle Arms that he had heard *two* pistol shots while he was scaring birds in the field beyond, and a year after that day, a lover, wishing to cut his sweetheart's name in a beech tree near the field, blunted his knife against a bullet in the bark. An old tale, still told by old fogeys in Swalebridge, but whether there had been a duel or an "accident" in the Tythe Field was never known as an historic fact. An old tale of thirty-four years ago, and for all that time since until the doctor's death the two men had been staunch friends.

Alice le Dreux had still smiled at the Squire, had given him the brightness of her eyes even when he was a white-haired man with a hasty temper—though always full of reverence to her. And after John and Madge were born Dr. le Dreux lost his wolfishness when other men were near his wife, but when he died clasping her hand in a tight cold grip, his eyes were fixed upon her face with the same hungry look of love which had been in them when first he had brought her to the Yorkshire town. He did not know his son and daughter, and babbled of the time when he was a young married man. He was savage with someone who wished to rob him of his wife. Death was the robber this time, and his wife was the victim of the theft.

I think Alice le Dreux had never been able to give him all the love he wanted. Perhaps the Warwickshire vicar's



daughter was not the real mate for a man whose blood came down from Jean le Dreux, Duke of Brittany, and Earl of the Honour of Swalebridge, whose device was an eagle with a bleeding heart. Yet she was a good wife to him (if I know all the secrets of her marriage) and mourned his death with a quiet grief. But life was not emptied for her because her husband had gone. She still found pleasure in the society of Swalebridge and district, and after her first deep mourning went out again to the houses where the friends of her young wifehood were widows, and mothers, and where men, once young gallants whose pulses had beaten faster at her glance, now, as old fogeys, still admired her beauty, still delighted to hear her play Mendelssohn, and in the security of old age, patted her hand and said: "My dear, once upon a time, you know, I was very much in love with you." She was nearly sixty when they said that and they were seventy and onwards, so it was quite safe and pleasant. But even at sixty and seventy the memory of a romance still warms the heart with the faint fragrance of the wine of youth.

Madge le Dreux adored her mother, quarrelled with her continually, petted her, cheek to cheek, after domestic strife, but did not understand her. John, to whom his mother was the best woman in the world, and who loved her with something of his father's jealousy, knew her. He knew her little weaknesses, her sweet old-fashioned vanities, her clinging to the small world in which she had lived since she entered as a girl-bride. For that reason, when "the old doctor" died, John put on one side very quietly but quite firmly Madge's pleadings to go to London, and settled down in his father's practice. He knew that it would be cruelty to tear up the roots of his mother's life, and cruelty to his mother was, as far as his own soul was concerned, the one unpardonable sin.

So he stayed on for three years until, as a swift stab out of the dark, Alice le Dreux was attacked by pneumonia, which not even a son's love and skill could cure. In a week she lay very beautiful and still on her white bed, regaining in death something of the snow-white-lily look which was remembered by those who knew her as a young woman. So at least said the old Squire, who knelt by her dead body with big tears rolling down his cheeks, and who walked, leaning heavily on John's arm, to the grave, where her poor dust was put by the side of her husband's coffin. To John



and Madge that death was a cruelty. Madge had wept passionate tears and for a month seemed heart-broken. John was dry-eyed, except for one secret hour, and then went calmly about his business. But his man's heart bled within him, though it was he who comforted his sister.

"Dear old John," said Madge. "I have only you left in the world now. Thank God we have always been good pals."

"The best of pals, Madge," said John.

That was true. They had been life-long comrades, this brother and sister, though, sometimes, as good comrades will, they had fought with each other. Once Madge had torn a handful of thick brown hair out of John's head, when he called her "saucer-eyes" for the first time. Once when in a bad temper she beat the puppy grandfather of Corydon, the sheep-dog, John, who loved animals, hurled a plate at her head and cut open her forehead with a dreadful gash which was still marked by a thin blue line. He was twelve years old then, and though they laughed at the episode now, he had not forgotten that moment when a passion of anger suddenly leapt to his heart and made him murderous. Four or five times since, when he was no longer a boy, he had been seized by such a passion, when his usually quiet pulse had thumped at a furious pace for a minute, and when his usually cold blood had gone to boiling-point.

The people of Swaledale are not likely to forget how John le Dreux, "the young doctor," got from his horse one winter afternoon on the bridge below the Castle and horsewhipped the blacksmith who had been knocking his wife about. The hulking fellow fought as though for life, but John le Dreux lashed him about the shoulders and legs until he cried for mercy. John, with a white face and burning eyes, finished only when his whip broke, and then laughed quietly and, getting on his horse, rode away while the crowd on the Castle bridge stared after him in dumb amazement. They had never suspected the quiet young doctor to have such strength or such a violent temper. John wondered at himself, and after riding on to the moors, sat motionless on his horse for an hour, like a figure carved in stone, staring down into the valley where the river was in spate after the rain. He knew that his punishment of the blacksmith had been brutal. He knew that he had lost control of himself, and that swift rage had leapt into him like



some devil. He would have killed the man if his whip had been a more murderous weapon.

"I must get a grip over myself," said John le Dreux. "One of these days I may go a step too far."

But after the plate-throwing incident he had never hurt Madge again. Together they had gone blackberrying and nutting along the banks of the river; together they had tramped for miles in the sunshine and in the snow over the moors, and had been friendly rivals in collecting butterflies and birds' eggs. That was in the old days. Then John had gone to the Manor School at York and Madge to a school at Harrogate, and only in the holidays did they enjoy their old comradeship. Then came John's life in Edinburgh, while Madge went to a school in Belgium to learn French, and when five years ago they both came back to the home at Swalebridge, John as a fully-fledged doctor, Madge with her hair up and her skirts down, they had to learn to know each other again, for both had been changed by the new growth into manhood and womanhood.

John was struck by his sister's beauty, a wild gipsy beauty which had startled him when they had met again after three years of separation. Her deep brown eyes were very quick to flash with fire, her dark eyebrows met quite close together at the first hint of anger or annoyance, her dark thick hair blew in wisps across her face and could not be kept tidy. She had developed into a very passionate and emotional young woman, and had a gift of language which sometimes overwhelmed her brother, who had become slow of speech and deliberate in thought before he spoke. He could see that she was restless, that the old town of Swalebridge was too narrow a groove for her desires of knowledge. She had no instinct for domesticity and declined resolutely to darn stockings or cook dinners, or to make flannel petticoats for poor old women. She read omnivorously and laid siege to the subscription library for all new works, which excited her by new theories of morality, and by pictures of a passionate life beyond her reach. She told the plots of them to John on long walks, when she tramped with him to patients in outlying farmsteads, or read aloud to him when they sat together in his surgery at night while he made up medicines or pottered about with one of his hobbies in natural history. John listened—he was a good listener—but he did not approve of many of



these novels, and when he called them "dangerous stuff," she jibed at him as a Puritan.

"Yes," said John, "I have something of the Puritan in me, but enough of the other thing." Madge asked "What thing?" and he answered, "To be cautious of heated imagination."

His knowledge of "the other thing" in his nature was based upon two or three experiences which he did not share with his sister. There was a clergyman's wife in the district who first awakened in him a sense something akin to fear of himself, and of women. She was a London-bred lady and utterly discontented with her life in a Yorkshire village, utterly out of sympathy with her husband's old-fashioned ideals of duty and spiritual fervour. A victim of headaches she called in young Dr. le Dreux and found his company if not his medicine very beneficial to her health. A woman with dreamy languorous eyes and with a strange grace of movement and gesture which John found curiously interesting and bewitching, she revealed herself rather intimately, rather too intimately, to her doctor, who after his professional inquiries and advice found himself drawn into long quiet talks about the mystery of life, and the passion of the human heart. Queer talk for a Yorkshire doctor who was not an expert in psychology! It was remarked by the watchful eyes in the small country town how often the young doctor rode down the hilly road towards the parish of Hartington, and how long the horse remained tethered to the vicarage gate. But one afternoon the young doctor was seen riding away with a white face, rather sternly set, and with a queer look in his brown eyes. No word passed his lips to Madge about the scene which had taken place in the drawing-room of the Vicar's wife, when a foolish, passionate, weak woman had spoken wild things. Never again did he attend the lady for headaches, but he remembered with a feeling of distrust to himself, how nearly he had come to the edge of a precipice, and how for a few minutes the Puritan and "the other thing" had fought fiercely for mastery above the abyss.

There was another episode in the Yorkshire life of John le Dreux which had not been told to Madge, who thought she knew all that was in her brother's heart. It was an episode spread over several months, and beginning with his encounter with Agatha Short in the tangled woods of a dingle through which a swift little burn went toiling and bubbling



into the Swale valley. Agatha was the daughter of a small farmer, and a wild untamed creature, like a water pixy. That is what she seemed to John le Dreux when first he saw her sitting on a rock in midstream with her bare feet dangling in the water, into which she peered at her own face, a brown little gipsy face, with her hair uncoiled. Often he met her in the woods, or calling the cattle home in the purple twilight, or carrying milk to outlying cottages. He had bent over his horse and talked to her, and sometimes she had held on to his saddle-strap and with bare feet had tramped across a part of the moor with him. Then one day he had kissed her, taken her in his arms, in the heart of a wood, through the leaves of which the sunlight peeped with a flickering light. At the touch of that kiss upon a girl's lips the warm blood passed through the veins of John le Dreux, who had called himself a Puritan, and when he rode homewards to the old grey town upon the hill his bronzed face was flushed and there was a reddish light in his eyes. Perhaps at that time the blood of Jehan le Dreux, Duc de Bretagne and Earl of the Honour of Swalebridge, and of those Normans who once had gone hawking and hunting (hunting other creatures than the wolves and boars) in these same woods, had awakened to the man who had none of their power but was the heir to their flesh and blood and name, and of their old device, the eagle with the bleeding heart.

There had been other kisses in the woods and behind grey old walls on the high moors, and then one day Agatha's pixy figure was seen no more in the district, and in the farmstead of her father her name was cursed. Because she had run away with a tinker who had mended many pots and pans in Yorkshire villages, and broken not a few poor pitchers—a wild, handsome gipsy blackguard who played the fiddle when he was not tinkering, and was a thief of other things than fowls and good wives' washing. John le Dreux was sorry for the child, but in his heart was glad for himself. Agatha Short had given her kisses too easily, and the memory of them was not altogether pleasant.

Perhaps the thought of such things was the secret reason why John le Dreux refused, and refused again, to take the big flight to London which Madge longed for with a beating heart like a bird in a cage. After that foolish little episode with the farmer's girl the women-folk about him were no more to John than studies in anatomy and physiology. Truth to

tell, the old ladies, the buxom farmers' wives, and the few strapping girls of Swalebridge, were not dangerous to a young man. Here was safety in the great solitude of moorland and dales. But away in London town, what might not happen to a man whose device was the eagle with the bleeding heart? In John le Dreux was the foreboding that he had yet to meet his great adventure, and with a touch of cowardice, perhaps, he shirked it.

But after the mother's death Madge's fretfulness and restlessness wore him down and gave him no peace. Then one day came a letter from an old fellow-student in London. He was run down in health. He must get away to the North country. He wanted to exchange his practice for a provincial job. Would not John le Dreux be tempted to try his luck in London?

John was not tempted, but for his sister's sake he gave a grudging acceptance to the offer of exchange. Thus, as we have seen, there was a new brass plate upon the railings of the corner ground-floor flat in Royal Avenue, Lavender Park, and a brother and sister, new to the world of London, waited for the adventures of its unknown life.



### CHAPTER III

FOR the first few weeks the brother and sister studied the life in this street of mansions as strangers who had no share in it, but were merely lookers-on. As yet, few patients had presented themselves to John le Dreux or had called for his assistance, and those few were rather uninteresting. At a little dispensary round the corner—in Park Road—which he had taken over from his friend, formerly in practice here, a frowsy woman had called with a scalded child, two withered working men had come for advice upon the one incurable disease—old age—and a servant girl had delivered herself into his hands for the simple operation of removing “adenoids.” At the flat, John had been called up one night to attend to a case of ptomaine poisoning—the victim was a Fleet Street journalist, who dictated leading articles on Tariff Reform in his delirium—and that was all. So far he was not on his way to make either a name or a fortune.

He had plenty of time, therefore, to study his surroundings and the social habits of the people. He found them interesting and amusing, and Madge made up stories about them and filled in the gaps of his imagination.

Many of the people seemed to hide themselves indoors all day and to emerge only with the dark, when they came out of their small flats and called, sometimes vainly, for hansom and taxicabs. They seemed, indeed, to have a passion for cabs, and a repugnance to walking a yard further than the kerbstone. Many of them were, at that hour, arrayed in fine linen, though not in purple. The men's shirt-fronts gleamed in the light of the street lamps, the women rustled down the stone stairs in filmy white frocks or black silk gowns, or in costumes of eccentric colour and design, and revealing white necks and arms which—as Madge remarked in her candid way—were in some cases so scraggy that it was shameless to expose them. On the other hand—as John replied—some were well worth showing, being as beautiful



as the busts and arms of marble goddesses. Quite a number of these young men and women—some of them could only be called young by courtesy—carried music satchels and strange instruments in leather cases, which bulged in unexpected places. Others held nothing but their petticoats, which they did with the prettiest grace imaginable.

Madge, lying in bed, could hear their hansoms returning down the street at midnight, or early in the morning, and the sound of their laughing voices calling out "good-night!" to friends, and their cabmen swearing at them because they offered less than the fare, or the fare without an adequate tip, and then tripped up to their flats, leaving the men to curse in the darkness until they grew tired.

Some of the night-birds of the street were not so splendid in apparel. Indeed, many of them wore trousers which bagged heavily at or below the knees, and well-worn coats, of which the pockets bulged with the outline of a pipe or of a book squeezed tightly inside. They usually left their flats at a few minutes past five, and John, sometimes sauntering out late at night—it was an old habit of his when sleep would not soften his pillow—met them coming home on foot from the side-turning between Park Road and Royal Avenue, to which they had no doubt been conveyed by the last tram home. For some time he was puzzled as to their business in life. It occurred to him, preposterously, that they might be professional thieves, who, having done their job in the darkness and safely deposited their plunder at the receiving office, returned to the bosoms of their families with a sense of duty nobly done.

Some of the men's faces—he saw them only in the twilight or the lamp-light—suggested that his idea might indeed be true. They were most of them men just approaching middle age, shabbily dressed, clean-shaven, with rather keen eyes, and with a look, as it seemed to John le Dreux, of men haunted by uneasy consciences. He discovered his mistake after disclosing his theory to Madge. With the aid of "Who's Who" and by dodging into the different entrances, where all owners of flats had their names on a board with "In" or "Out" attached on movable tablets, she discovered that John's "burglars" were really journalists who edited or sub-edited London newspapers, and, like emperors and kings, never spoke of themselves in the first person singular, but had the awful authority of the word "we."



A different set of people came out by day in this long street of mansions. They came out first in sky-blue or scarlet dressing-gowns, but no further than their balconies, where they watered, or snipped the dead leaves off geraniums and climbing nasturtiums, while they carried on conversations—which could be heard in the street below, if they did not live in the topmost flats—with maid-servants dusting the dining-rooms inside, or with husbands lingering over breakfast and the morning paper. A little later in the morning, having changed their dressing-gowns for tailor-made skirts and coats, some of these ladies ventured a little further out, as far as the railings outside the mansion where they paid long farewells, with many chirrupings and little cries of pride and joy, to beautiful pink babies in elegant perambulators, who were afterwards wheeled into the park by demure little nursemaids. But there were not many of these babies. John and Madge calculated that there was about one baby to five flats, and seldom more than one baby in one flat. In Swalebridge there had often been fourteen children in one cottage, but here, in the London street of mansions, the size of the family seemed to be nicely adjusted by a special providence to the size of the flat, which, by the benevolence of the builders, had just sufficient accommodation for one baby and for its necessary nursemaid. Perhaps it was this limitation which made each infant so precious to its mother, who seemed to regard it as a special miracle, and so intensely interesting to neighbours not so blessed among women, who often came on to their balconies to watch the preparations for the park, and expressed their admiration of the baby's beauty in terms of ecstasy.

By half-past nine in the morning a medley of musical sound came out of the open windows of the little flats from one end of the long street to the other. Strolling down the length of the mansions, John and Madge could hear snatches of light operas and of drawing-room ballads being trilled in light soprano, or deep contralto, and the swiftly tinkling notes of pianos, touched by light fingers in flats five stories high, or nearer to the earth, and here and there the thin notes of a violin running up and down the scale without accompaniment, or wailing like a soul in pain with sobbing tears in tremolo.

All these musicians, amateur or professional, ignored with wonderful self-restraint the Italian organ-grinder, who,



at the same hours, rivalled them in the street below with the "Marseillaise," played as a jig tune, the intermezzo to "Cavalleria Rusticana," *allegro maestoso*, "I'm afraid to go home in the dark," or other popular ballads, ground out with the solemn pathos of an anthem. Indeed, so far from resenting this street rivalry, many of the ladies in the flats encouraged it by flinging out *largesse* in copper coins, which fell two hundred and fifty feet, and then bounced into far off gutters, and one lady who, as Madge noticed, remained longer in her dressing-gown than her neighbours, used often to come to the balcony of a third-floor flat and enter into familiar conversation with one of the organ-grinders in his native Italian, waving her hand to him at the finish in a comradely way, with a cry of "*a rivederci!*"

There was another inhabitant of this street of mansions who spoke fluent Italian but who was the single-handed champion of quietude and the strenuous enemy of all organ-grinders. It was a tall, loose-limbed man, who invariably wore a Norfolk jacket with the two ends of the waistband hanging loose like tails behind him, and who, half-way through the morning, used to take a stroll in the park in wool-worked slippers and without a hat. Both John and Madge liked the look of the man. He had dreamy blue eyes and a long, hatchet face with a rather whimsical mouth, and short, fair hair—going bald over the forehead—through which he had a habit of running his fingers in a thoughtful way, and regardless of the parting. He seemed to have a passion for babies and small children, and would often stand by one of the perambulators starting out for the morning expedition talking in a serious philosophical way to some speechless infant of one year's wisdom, who would stare up at him with round eyes as though fully understanding his remarks, but a little doubtful of their truth. And sometimes in the park John and Madge would come upon him leaning back on one of the seats with two or three rather dirty urchins sitting in a row by his side, and at least one bald-headed baby, taken from a wooden box on wheels, dumped down on his sharp, bony knees, and all perfectly quiet while he sang little songs to them in a quiet voice, or, as it seemed to the brother and sister who passed him slowly, told them fairy-tales which made their eyes big with wonder.

It was this man who was the very devil to all organ-grinders. Like Aunt Betsy with the donkey boys, he would



pounce out upon them at all times of the day, and, unlike Aunt Betsy, would, in quiet, melodious Italian, call them names, and would say hard things about their grandmothers, which brought blushes to the cheeks of those dirty-faced, garlic-smelling musicians of the street. His eloquence left them speechless, and, without a word, they would trundle their melody machines higher up the street. Madge was extremely interested in his personality, and liked his face. Tip-toeing into the hall of the block of mansions, and knowing that he lived in the right-hand flat on the first floor, she found that his name was Bertram Ordish, and, upon reference to "Who's Who," she discovered that he was a novelist, and the author of "The White Pearl," "The Wood Pixies," "The Rogue," and other stories at six shillings apiece, and under "recreations" in "Who's Who" was "nursing other people's babies, and mountain-climbing," two hobbies which seemed incompatible.

"I should like to know that fellow," said John le Dreux; and Madge said, not for the first time, "I like his face."

One other characteristic of their neighbours was remarked by the young doctor and his sister. Those ladies who had not babies, and especially those who had neither babies nor husbands, lavished their love upon little dogs. These small animals accompanied them in the mornings when they went shopping in the Park Road—which runs parallel with Royal Avenue—and at night it was usual to see quite a dozen ladies strolling up and down in the darkness, sometimes in evening-dress and always without hats, with the object, it seemed, of giving their pets a little run before bedtime.

It was this habit which led to the first introduction of John and Madge le Dreux to the social life of the mansions.

One evening John was out for a stroll with Corydon, who was a sheep dog, accustomed to the moorland life, and missing the long romps with his master up hill and down dale had become somewhat irritable in temper since his life as a pavement dog. He resented the yapping pleasantries of the little poodles of maiden ladies, and upon this evening, when he mouched in a melancholy way at John's heels, he turned savage when a small fox terrier came taunting him with shrill barks and derisive boundings. John le Dreux was suddenly startled out of a reverie by a horrid noise of scuffling, deep barking, growling, whining, and howling, twenty yards



ahead of him, and he saw the dark shadow of Corydon doing murderous things to the white terrier.

"Good Lord, he will gobble the little beast up at one gulp!" said John. And with a "Come away, there, Corydon," he strode forward.

But at that moment the slim white figure of a girl rushed past him, and, with a whip raised high, lashed Corydon again and again.

"You beast!" she cried, "oh, you beastly beast!"

Corydon ignored her blows, and with his temper up and red eyes, and low, murderous growls, proceeded with his work of vengeance. The little fox terrier was very near to death. The slim girl in white raised the butt end of her whip on Corydon's head.

"Oh, you devil!" she cried, in a voice of rage and anguish. "Get off with you. Oh, my poor little Snow-white!"

John was on the scene then. He got his fingers well down into Corydon's collar, hit him severely over the nose, and hauled him off his victim. Corydon struggled violently. It went to his heart to be balked of his prey, and, with his hair on end and his teeth grinning white, he panted and strained at his collar. But John held him in an iron grip, and spoke stern words to him.

The girl in white had picked up her yelping fox terrier, and, regardless of her lace-worked blouse, laid its head with a bleeding ear against her bosom.

"Oh, my poor little Snow-white," she said. "Was he nearly killed by a nasty cruel brute?"

She turned to John le Dreux. "That dog of yours ought to be shot," she said. "You ought to be ashamed to keep such a beast."

"Oh, old Corydon is all right," said John. "He is a great friend of mine."

"Indeed!" said the girl. "Well, I advise you to send him to a Home."

She was very angry. John could see that by her sparkling eyes, and he recognised her as the girl whom one night he had seen tripping down the stairs from a flat above his own.

"Your little creature exasperated him," he said quietly. "He is not used to such impertinence, having lived a dignified life in the country. However, there is not much damage done, I think."

He went close to the girl, and under the electric lamp

felt the body and neck of the small beast which crouched whimpering in her arms.

"Not much damage done!" said the girl. "Well, what do you call that—blood or red ink?"

"Blood," said John. "It's only his ear. A little cold water will stop that. Now, if Corydon had got his teeth into his throat——"

"I would have poisoned him," said the girl, "if he had killed my Snow-white. The brute!"

"Oh, he is a most friendly old fellow," said John. "Wouldn't hurt a kitten, unless he was exasperated beyond his patience."

The girl laughed. "A most amiable creature, I am sure!"

She turned away with her small pet.

"Anyhow, I am sorry," said John.

She looked back over her shoulder. "The apology comes somewhat late," she said.

Then she went swiftly into the entrance of the mansions, and John, with a "Heel, Corydon," followed her at a leisurely pace.

"A haughty damsel," said John le Dreux to himself; "but I rather like her pluck. She tackled Corydon in fine style."

It happened that on the next morning, as he was going out with Madge and Corydon, he came face to face with the lady of his adventure. She blushed a little, and would have passed, but he lifted his hat and said, "How is Snow-white this morning?"

She hesitated, looked annoyed for a moment, and then laughed quite good-naturedly.

"Oh, he has recovered, thanks." She looked down at Corydon, and shook a small white fist at him. "Oh, you wicked devil!"

Corydon blinked at her and grinned.

Madge had heard about the combat, and now spoke to their neighbour, with an apology for the dog's bad behaviour.

"It is quite unusual for him to lose his temper!"

"I am afraid I lost my temper too," said the girl. She looked up at John with a smile. "I think I was very rude to you last night."

"Good lord, no!" said John.

"Oh yes, I was," said the girl, very decidedly, as though



she did not like being contradicted. "I was shamefully rude. But of course one doesn't like having one's pet murdered before one's very eyes, does one?"

"Certainly not," said John.

The girl smiled again and passed on. Then, suddenly, she came back and faced Madge.

"You are new-comers here, aren't you? May I call on you? I like the look of you so much. And it's rotten living above nice people and not knowing them."

There was something impulsive and unconventional and frankly good-natured about these words which took Madge by surprise.

"Oh, do," she said. "We know nobody here, and it's rather lonely."

"Right," said the girl. "Expect me when you see me. My name is Winifred Vernon. I am in No. 16. Good-morning."

She flitted upstairs, and when John and Madge stepped into the street they both laughed.

"What a peculiar young person," said John. "Rather jolly, though, don't you think?"

"Winifred Vernon," said Madge thoughtfully. "I seem to know that name. I wonder who she is."

Winifred Vernon herself gave the fullest information on the subject when, three afternoons later, she played a lively tattoo on the door of the corner ground-floor flat, and entered Margaret's little drawing-room in a flowered muslin gown tied up with dainty pink bows. She was an attractive-looking girl with fair, rather fluffy hair brushed back over a square forehead, with grey eyes which looked at one very frankly and steadily, and with a firm little mouth and a well-rounded chin which suggested determination and "grit." Madge, who felt nervous and uneasy for a moment, unfamiliar with the tone and temper of London ladies, was quickly put at her ease by a girl of her own age who called her "my dear" at the end of five minutes, who said "damn" when she nearly upset her teacup, who laughed with delightful ripples of mirth in the most natural and unembarrassed way, and, with remarkable candour, revealed her business and habits of life without waiting to be questioned.

"I think I know your name, Miss Vernon," Madge had said, in the first attempt to make conversation, and the words had fulfilled their purpose admirably.

"Do you? Why, then, I must be getting famous! Oh yes, I dare say you have seen my name on the paper covers of threepenny novelettes and on the magazine pages of half-penny papers. 'A new novel by Miss Winifred Vernon, author of "Little Sweetheart," "Maid Marion," etc., etc., etc. We beg to announce to our readers that on Monday next will commence a new serial, full of passion, love-interest, and charm, by the delightful author of "Little Sweetheart," and "The Heart Bowed Down."' It sounds pretty well, doesn't it?"

She pressed back her hair from her forehead and laughed, as though infinitely amused at such notoriety.

"It must be splendid to be so famous," said Madge, gazing at her with a kind of reverence.

"Oh, it is!" said Winifred Vernon. "You have no idea how splendid it is to write love stories at ten shillings a thousand words for publishers who only pay when you send them a lawyer's letter, and for newspaper editors who ring you up on the telephone with such polite messages as, 'Can't you make something happen? That last instalment of yours was nothing but tosh.'"

She folded a slim piece of bread and butter in two, ate it—quite daintily—in two mouthfuls, and then said to Madge:

"My dear, don't you ever be tempted to earn your living by writing third-rate fiction. I assure you it is the most heart-breaking work, and very bad for one's morals. Oh, how I hate my heroes, with their curly moustaches! How I would like to shake my little heroines, with their palpitating hearts! How I loathe the very name of love! If any man were to say 'I love you' to me—and no man has ever been tempted that way—I should strike him in the face, and say, 'Keep that for a serial story, at ten shillings a thousand words.'"

"But why do you write these stories if you hate them so much?" asked Madge, quite perplexed.

"Bless you, I must earn my living, mustn't I?" said Miss Vernon. "I have no nice big brother to provide bread and butter for me. On the contrary, my dear, I don't mind telling you that I keep a drunken brother in an inebriates' home, and his poor wife and children in a country cottage—and all that on ten shillings a thousand words!"

Madge was quick to express sympathy, and her dark



eyes glowed with admiration. Here was one of her stories which she had imagined in the lives of those who inhabited that street of mansions. Winifred Vernon had seemed to her a nice little thing. Now she was one of the heroines of real life.

The girl read something of these thoughts in Madge's eyes.

"Oh, I only do it because I have to," she said quickly. "Don't you run away with the idea that I am a noble creature. I have no virtuous pleasure whatever in supporting other people's babies. I would much rather buy pap for some of my own. But I have no such luck!"

She sighed, and a sudden light leapt into her eyes, and then died out. After just a second of silence she became conversational again, and gave a rapid sketch of her daily life. She lived with two friends—unmarried girls, like herself—one a fashion artist, the other a journalist, and "the best of comrades." They always brought her breakfast in bed, bless them! and there she lay until twelve o'clock, scribbling her rubbish as fast as her hand would write. She reckoned to do a thousand words an hour, but she could not keep it up for more than three hours at a stretch, without her brain going fuzzy. Then she would get up, have a cold bath—"very good for the nerves, my dear"—and lunch on boiled eggs or fried haddock, cooked by her own hands on a gas-stove, which smelt horribly because the other girls wouldn't be bothered to keep it clean. The afternoon she kept for fresh air, shopping, visiting, picture-galleries—she would sit for an hour in one of Turner's landscapes—idling, and reading other people's works of fiction, from which she "cribbed" as many ideas as she could work into her own line of business. In the evening she would often work again for two or three hours, when she had commissions on hand, but when business was slack, she would cadge for a free ticket to a theatre, and take a hansom cab to heaven. "The theatre is my heaven," she said, "and to me all actresses are angels."

When she was pressed with work it was sometimes very annoying that their flat upstairs was often the rendezvous of all kinds of half-celebrities, who dropped in to air their egotism, and to make night hideous with tortured fiddle-strings and a tinkling piano. Otherwise it was quite amusing, and some of them were friends worth having in fair weather and foul.

She mentioned two of them—Bertram Ordish and Raymond Fraquet.

"The one a bear," she said, "a quiet, ordinary old bear; the other——" she hesitated, puckered up her forehead a little, and then found her simile, "a faun, a Greek thing of the woods, in the likeness of a man."

Madge was breathless. "Is that Raymond Fraquet, who writes plays for the Court Theatre?"

"The very same," said Winifred Vernon.

"Oh," said Madge, "he is very wonderful, and rather frightening sometimes. He must be deeply interesting. Does he really live in this street of ours?"

"Why not?" asked Miss Vernon, smiling at so much awe. "He is pretty poor, like the rest of us. You must come to our flat and learn to know him. I believe he would like you." She looked at Madge with a friendly, critical stare, at her wild-rose, gipsy beauty, and into the liquid pools of her brown eyes. "Yes; I am sure he would like you."

"Oh no," said Madge quickly. "I am so ignorant of life—such a provincial! And he is so clever, and I think sometimes rather cruel—in his writing, I mean."

"Cruel?" said Winifred Vernon, thinking over the words. "It never struck me before. I wonder!"

She did not come to the decision on the point, but suddenly said, with a new warmth of voice:

"And Mrs. Fraquet, Phillida! Oh, but you must know her! She is alone among women, and virtue goes out of her."

"Is she wonderful also?" asked Madge. "What does she do, write, or paint, or sing?"

"She just lives," said Winifred Vernon, "and that is enough. No, she does not write, or paint, or sing. Those things, after all, are so often done, badly, or pretty well. But she is a prose poem, a picture—by Fra Angelico, I think, or one of those old fellows—and living music."

She got up with a swish of skirts. "And now I will go, for that is quite a good sentence, which I must write down for further use. It came into my head suddenly, and is far too good to lose."

She laughed. "You see what it is to be a third-rate novelist!"

She took both Madge's hands in her own, and said, "I



have been talking a donkey's hind leg off, and tiring you to death. Oh yes, I have! But do come to see us up aloft. We have all been peeping down upon you from the balcony, and fell in love with you."

"With me!" cried Madge, quite astonished, but pleased as all women are pleased by their sisters' praise.

"And bring that big brother of yours," said Miss Vernon, "though I shall be horribly frightened of him. He looks at one as though he saw one's bones. Such eagle eyes!"

"When shall we come?" said Madge; and Winifred Vernon said that very evening at nine o'clock.

"We can't afford to give you supper, you know; but there will be weak coffee—abominably made by my friend Patsy, and strong conversation. I think the Fraquets are coming in. Now, don't fail or forget."

She laughed into Madge's eyes, said, "I will find my way out," went swiftly from the drawing-room, and had the door shut behind her before Madge, following, had time to open it.

To John le Dreux his sister described that visit, and Winifred Vernon's curious and delightful candour, and her gift of friendliness, and her strange life. And, repeating the invitation, she said:

"Do let us go, John."

John, deep in an arm-chair, with his legs stretched out, stared at Corydon, who was blinking up at him from a brand-new imitation bear-skin.

"Yes, we will go," he said. "We must not live like hermits. But, though you would not think it, little sister, I am always afraid of strangers. They have such a knack of interfering with one's life."

In this case his foreboding was right. For in the eight-roomed flat upstairs was the adventure for which John and Madge le Dreux had both been waiting—the great adventure of their lives.

## CHAPTER IV

To the brother and sister, fresh from a small provincial town on the edge of the Yorkshire Moors, the company and conversation in the flat above their own were as strange as if they had come from Mars. These men and women here, belonged to a world of which John and Madge le Dreux had only obtained brief, unreal glimpses in the mirror of books. Their code of behaviour had nothing in common with the etiquette observed in the drawing-rooms at Swalebridge, when gentlemen farmers, rectors, and curates of Yorkshire parishes, retired army men, widows of retired army men deceased, elderly maiden ladies, motherly married ones, had assembled on winter evenings. They spoke among themselves, though not to John and Madge, a language of allusions, of literary and artistic slang, which seemed to belong to some inner society of intellectuals, with secret code words, and ideas, unintelligible to all who had not been initiated into the mysteries of their circle. They seemed to find their own life, their own work, their own characters, remarkably droll. They laughed at the world as a funny old place, full of absurdities.

In this world it seemed they had to assume certain poses, setting a value on themselves which, among each other, in their private life, they confessed to be a false estimate, adopted only for professional purposes. They seemed to say to each other, "Let us drop the pretence now that we are together. We can't deceive each other, you know." Possessing, it seemed, the wisdom of all the philosophers, and pooh-poohing it with an air of intellectual superiority, as though the philosophers were rather dull old fellows with pompous ideas, which had been torn to tatters by the critics, they behaved with a kind of childishness, and a disregard for dignity, which were startling and peculiar to the strangers within their gates. Still, it was all extraordinarily interesting and stimulating, and, above all, John and Madge le Dreux



were surprised that they, two babes in the intellectual wood, should be received with a welcome and a kindliness of which the sincerity could not be doubted.

Winifred Vernon had welcomed them first, with a nod of familiarity, as though they were old friends.

"My dear," she said to Madge, "you look like a beautiful witch in that white frock. But see—just one little touch of colour—oh, that makes a perfect picture of you—and Patsy shall sketch you with the lamplight shedding its effulgent beams upon your beauty!"

She had taken a red rose from a vase, and without a "by your leave," fixed it into Margaret's coils of brown-red hair.

"I apologise for my friend's impudence," said a tall, willowy girl with a dead-white face and black mournful eyes, "but I must say that her taste is without fault this time. If you don't object, Miss le Dreux, I *will* make a little sketch of you. Faces have a fascination for me. . . . There is something rather good in this light and shade effect. It will come rather well in charcoal."

She had a drawing board on her knees as she sat curled up in the corner of a sofa, and without further ceremony held up a stump of charcoal, shut one eye, and measured Madge's nose and the proportions of her face.

"Beastly rude way of receiving a guest," said another girl who, on her hands and knees, was boiling coffee in a copper pot over a methyated spirit-stove. She blew out the light with a vigorous puff, and, still on her knees, looked up at Madge and John.

"Winifred has not introduced me. I'm the Cinderella of the flat, and my ugly sisters are both ashamed of me. Bertram Ordish, make yourself useful, and tell them who I am."

In the far corner of the room sat the man whom John and Madge had seen bullying Italian organ-grinders in their native tongue, and singing nursery rhymes to grubby urchins in the park. He was deep in a wicker chair with his hands behind his head and his eyes shut, but he now stood up, and, with his hands in his jacket pockets, came across the room, looking first at the girl on her knees and then at Madge, with a whimsical smile.

"This is Miss Bernadine Brett," he said gravely. "Commonly called Bunny because she is always popping out of



holes and scuttling away again, and burrowing in underground places."

"Go on," said the girl. "Don't mind me."

"A distinguished member of the staff of *The Daily Record*, and a great authority on sanitary engineering, model dwellings, and poor law relief. She sleeps with the Poor Law Commission Report as a pillow, I understand."

"I sleep with the fox-terrier at my toes," said Miss Brett calmly.

"Like all journalists, and especially women journalists, she has a complete disregard for the truth, a deeply cynical attitude towards life, and an immense knowledge of all that is most squalid and least worth knowing in human nature. Among other things she makes the vilest coffee, in spite of my long tuition."

"Thanks," said Miss Bernadine Brett. "I shall remember that speech when I next have to criticise one of your feeble novels. Meanwhile, as you dislike my coffee, you shall not have any."

"For which good fairies be praised!" said Bertram Ordish. "Now, perhaps you will return the compliment and formally present me to this lady—whom I already recognise as a neighbour."

"Oh, revenge!" said Miss Brett, pouring out a steaming cup of coffee and handing it to Madge. "This is Mr. Bertram Ordish, unsuccessful novelist and professional mountain climber. He has produced seven failures, mostly plagiarised from Henry James and George R. Sims. Also he once climbed to the top of Primrose Hill, when he fainted from over-exertion and had to be taken home in a taxicab, for which his rescuer paid. Mr. Ordish—Miss Margaret le Dreux."

"Now that we know each other perfectly," said Bertram Ordish, "we need no longer stand on ceremony." He sat down next to Madge, pulled out a very big and very black old pipe, said "Do you permit?" filled it without waiting for an answer, and puffed a cloud of smoke to the ceiling in beautifully curly rings.

"Do you happen to know any fairy-tales?" he said to Madge.

"Fairy-tales?" laughed Madge. "Do you mean 'Hop o' my Thumb,' and 'The Little Tin Soldier'?"

"I know those," said Ordish gravely. "But you come from Yorkshire, don't you? Haven't they any special and



private fairy-tales on the moors? If so I should be glad to hear them."

John le Dreux, who had listened to that request with a smile, did not hear his sister's answer, but he knew that she was as familiar as he was with some of the old legends of the moors, and when next, after twenty minutes, he was able to give his attention to Madge and her new friend, he heard Ordish say, in a voice of quiet excitement:

"But do you mean to say he couldn't get out of the cave again? Well now, that was an awkward thing, certainly! I always think those goblin fellows are wonderfully cute, don't you?"

John le Dreux himself was in a three-cornered conversation with Winifred Vernon and Bernadine Brett, the journalist. He was surprised to find how quickly they had made him feel at ease with himself and them, and their frankness of speech made him forget what he had never quite forgotten before in talking to women, except professionally—the differences of sex, and the danger which lurks in those differences. They were talking of their street of mansions and of the lives of the people in the flats around. He had asked a question or two, and they were full of information. Winifred Vernon especially was a guide to knowledge.

"This," she said, "is 'Intellectual Avenue.' Most of us live on our wits here, and many of us spread our bread with the butter of imagination."

"Pretty thick as far as you are concerned," said Bernadine.

"You must understand," said Winifred, "that we belong to the world of Would-be-greats. Oh, a curious world, I assure you, but with quite a lot of little tragedies in the back bedrooms. Most of us here are failures."

"Oh, speak for yourself," said Miss Bernadine.

"I speak for all of us," said Winifred. "In almost every flat you will find what is technically known as 'cultured poverty,' the very worst form of poverty, because it goes along with passionate desires for all that is beautiful and very expensive."

"That is too intimate a revelation of your own psychology," said Bernadine.

"In every flat," said Winifred, "you will find disappointed hopes staring at you from the title pages of books which nobody reads, from pictures in oils, water colours and

black and white, which nobody buys, and in the music of voices just not good enough to be worth anybody's money. . . . Now, be quiet, Bernadine, because I'm talking like a book. We are the Half-great, Mr. le Dreux. We are the Just-fall-shorts. These flats are occupied by second-rate novelists (the fifty pounds down on account of royalties), by actresses who play minor parts, or understudy their successful sisters (whom they hate like poison), by artists who get their pictures back from the Academy on the last day ("the Crowded-outs"), by playwrights whose pieces run five nights or get a show in the afternoon bills, by journalists who are sub-editors instead of editors, and assistant leader-writers instead of chief leader-writers, by musicians who give music lessons to young ladies, and concerts (at their own expense), to critics who sit on three chairs at the same time and go to sleep, dreaming deliciously of the cruel things they will write that evening."

Bernadine laughed. "You put your colour on too thick," she said.

"To all of us," said Winifred, putting her hand over Bernadine's mouth, "publicity is the breath of our nostrils. A newspaper paragraph, if complimentary, fills us with ecstasy. A publisher's advertisement with our name in bold type is as good as a dinner at Frascati's. And those of us who are critics (as a means of livelihood) fasten upon the spirit and flesh of those who have succeeded and do our best to drag them down. A glorious game, a wonderful life!"

"Now that you have quite finished all that nonsense," said Bernadine Brett, called "Bunny," "I should like to tell Mr. le Dreux that there is not a word of truth in what you have said."

Winifred Vernon, author of "Sweetheart and I," laughed quite good naturedly, and said:

"Well, it's your innings now, Bunny. Let us hear your version of the inner life of this street."

"Winifred," said Bernadine, "is a private cynic because she is a professional sentimentalist. I, being a journalist, am a seeker after truth."

"Tell me the truth, then," said John le Dreux, smiling down at this little tired-faced woman of thirty-four or so, who sat on the hearth-rug at his feet with her back to the coal scuttle.



"Well, at least some of us in this street," said Miss Brett, "have high ideals, and therefore—if Winifred will please not to interrupt—small incomes."

"Oh!" said Winifred Vernon, with a little gasp, "that is pretty good for a start. Go on, my dear. This is getting quite interesting. High ideals! High fiddlesticks!"

"Speaking generally," said Miss Brett (and Winifred said, "Good phrase"), "the people here are too honest to have any chance of big success. The boomsters do not live down this Avenue."

"Boomsters," said John. "Who are they? I never heard of them."

Winifred laughed. "Remember you are talking to a child of Nature, Bunny. Deal gently with him."

"The boomsters," said Miss Brett, "are a tribe of men and women who boom loudly, stridently, and incessantly. They say—and they pay people to say—'We are the great ones, the only great, the truly great.' Of course, the poor old fool-public believes them."

"I see," said John.

"He sees!" said Winifred, smiling at him.

"These people fudge on to the public a lot of flashy work full of false ideas, and stale ideas dressed up to look like new, and things that pretend to be ideas, which the public mistakes for ideas. Now, in this street you will find quite a number of people who do honest work. Their ideas may not be very big, or very wonderful, but at least they are ideas, and their own, and the things they believe and love. They do not write entirely for money——"

"Oh, fudge!" said Winifred; "what do I write for? I have sold my soul to Mammon at a wretched price. What else do they write for, pray?"

"Because they want to express some sense of beauty or some truth, as they see truth."

"Poor fools! poor fools! Why don't they earn an honest livelihood like their good old illiterate parents, in city offices and suburban shops?" This was Winifred's cruelty.

"Of course," said Bernadine Brett, descending with a sudden drop to the depths of pessimism. "I know it is all a stupid farce. It is ridiculous to strive for any beauty of idea or expression. The people do not want it, the spirit

of the age is all against it, and writers, like Bertram Ordish there, and Raymond Fraquet, are merely beating their heads and breaking their hearts against the brick walls of stupidity and vulgarity."

"I wonder which is harder," said Winifred, very thoughtfully. "Bertram's head or the brick wall? And I can't imagine that lazy old bear breaking his heart. A very big, simple heart, I'll allow."

And then she looked over to the door and said, "Here is Raymond Fraquet, with the Lady Phillida."

John le Dreux was sorry for the interruption. He had been quietly amused by the way in which the two girls had been dogmatising to him, as though, indeed, he were a messenger from Mars interested in the psychology of the earth people as represented in this street of mansions. But he rose from his seat as they went over to the new-comers, each girl taking a hand of the woman who entered with her husband, and who gave her hands to them with a smiling greeting, which needed no words. She was older, perhaps, than Winifred Vernon, the little, fair-haired story-teller, and a year younger than Bernadine Brett, the journalist girl, who called herself the Cinderella of the flat. Taller than either of them by three inches, she had that indefinable air which distinguishes most married women from unmarried girls, a certain dignity and quietude, and an expression of fuller knowledge and experience. Yet there was something girlish also in this woman's face, in the eyes which smiled down upon the two friends, and in the tenderness and sweetness of a mouth which touched each of their foreheads with a sisterly kiss, her black hair, loosely coiled in a knot that rested in the curve of a rather long neck—a charming curve, he thought—and a little rope of pearls about the white column of her throat. She wore a black dress of some silken texture, full skirted, and cut low and square at the neck, where a narrow blue ribbon ran in and out of the hem. To John le Dreux, who was watching her, she seemed a charming figure in this simplicity of black, and then he wondered, with a doctor's instinct, at the pearl-whiteness of her skin, except where each cheek was touched with red, and at the shadows which did not stir as she came further into the light of the room, beneath her eyes.

She sat now on the sofa by the side of the artist girl, Patsy, who was still sketching in charcoal, and putting her



hand on the girl's shoulder, peeped over the drawing-board, and then glanced, with raised eyebrows at Madge, who was talking still with Bertram Ordish.

"Quite good, Patsy," said Mrs. Fraquet.

John was standing near her now, and the sound of her voice stirred him with a pleasant emotion, setting some chord—perhaps of reminiscence, or of imagination—vibrating within him. He wanted her to speak again, but Patsy, the artist, said:

"Hush! She has forgotten all about me, and I want to get that mouth right."

And then John found himself being presented to Raymond Fraquet.

"A new-comer to the street—Dr. le Dreux," said Miss Vernon. "He lives downstairs, so that when we want medical attendance, we need only stamp on the floor three times, and, hey presto! up he will come like a good fairy, with smelling-salts or sticking-plaster."

"Very convenient," said Raymond Fraquet; "but, personally, I would rather call in the devil than a doctor."

His hand, thin and delicate, was still unreleased from the young doctor's grip when the words were spoken, and, although they might have been taken as an insult by a sensitive man, they were redeemed by the smile about his lips. John looked squarely at the man who had condemned his profession so violently, and found him to be of slight build, with a delicately chiselled face and restless grey-blue eyes; a man of about thirty-six, with rather long brown hair brushed back from a high, narrow forehead. He was in evening-clothes, with a black velvet dinner-jacket, rather the worse for wear.

"A doctor is generally less expensive than the devil," said John, releasing Raymond's hand, which instantly went up to his hair to thrust it back further from his forehead.

John ended the words with a laugh, as Raymond Fraquet had spoken with a smile, and Winifred Vernon said:

"Bravo, and well answered! Now, Raymond, what have you got to say to that?"

Raymond Fraquet's restless eyes glanced round the room.

"The devil would give one more fun for one's money,"

he said lightly. "They say he's a most agreeable companion, and provides every kind of delightful experience."

"But he sends in a long bill at the end," said Winifred.

Fraquet seemed to be preparing more pleasantry on the subject of the devil, but he checked himself, and looked across to his wife. She appeared to feel his glance upon her, and looked up instantly. It seemed to John le Dreux, the looker-on, that Raymond Fraquet had wounded his wife by his words, and that he knew he had wounded her.

"It is amusing to talk like that," she said, "but such words do no good. One cannot deny the spirit of evil. We find it lurking so often in our own hearts."

"Never in yours, my dear," said Winifred Vernon; and Mrs. Fraquet said:

"Yes, often and always."

"But, to come back to doctors," said Raymond Fraquet lightly, "with all respect to Mr. le Dreux, there, I think the less we have to do with them the better. They are harbingers of pain, and I hate pain. I should like to forget it."

"It so often makes itself remembered," said Mrs. Fraquet. "It will not let us forget."

"Oh, we must try to forget," said Raymond Fraquet. "The art of life is in forgetfulness. If we remembered all our miseries of the past and the certainty of future wretchedness, we could not live at all. I, for one, should just end the job."

As he spoke, the light died out in his eyes, and, for a moment, a look of melancholy took possession of his delicate face. But only for a moment. Sitting with his back to the piano and his hands behind his head, he laughed quietly, and said:

"It's all a game of make-believe. No one can be really happy, but we can pretend to be happy, which is the next best thing. Let us pretend to be happy to-night, and talk philosophy, and music, and art, and letters, as if they really mattered. Of course, they don't matter in the least, but they are quite amusing."

He led the way by asking Margaret le Dreux if she had seen Bernard Shaw's latest play, and was surprised when she confessed she had not seen any play of Bernard Shaw's, nor any play at all, having spent her life in a remote town in Yorkshire. The confession was not without shame for



Madge le Dreux, and was blushing said, but Raymond Fraquet, after his first surprise, seemed enchanted to meet a girl so "unspoilt and unstained"—they are his own words—by the squalid stupidity of the modern drama.

"And yet," he said, leaning forward, and looking at her in a thoughtful, wondering way, "I am tempted to experiment on you. It would be extraordinarily interesting if the first time you go to a theatre it should be to see one of my plays. You would be the only one in the audience to see it without prejudice, without waiting for expected plagiarisms, without knowing anything of stage construction or stage conventions, without comparing what you see to a thousand and one other plays which have left all others in the audience blasé, bored, intellectually weary and emotionally exhausted. You would be the real critic, and I should value your criticism more than that of the weary gentlemen who will sneer at me in the next day's papers."

There was a note of bitterness in these last words, of anger as well as of bitterness, as though he had a grudge against those newspaper critics, but then he smiled at Madge—it was a rather charming, enticing smile—and said:

"Will you come? I have a first night next week."

"Oh, I should love to come," said Madge eagerly.

But Mrs. Fraquet spoke quickly after her words. "The experiment would not be fair, Raymond," she said. "Your play is not the first a girl should see. I fancy it should be the last."

Raymond Fraquet laughed, not quite mirthfully or easily.

"My wife does not agree with some of my ideas. She is mediæval and orthodox, and I am modern and heretical. But my new play is quite harmless and amiable. It is just a study in emotion, and would not hurt a child."

"Perhaps it depends on the child," said Winifred Vernon. "Some children I know are very quick to abandon the simple innocence of their babyhood."

"Quite right," said Bertram Ordish. "Some of the bald-headed babies I know are frightfully cynical in their outlook upon life."

The subject of conversation changed and changed again, a hundred times. Ideas were tossed up, and to and fro, from one to another, though sometimes the other speakers waited while Bertram Ordish and Raymond Fraquet played



a game together with a quick give and take. Yet John le Dreux, who rarely caught one of these fleeting thoughts in time to play it back, noticed that Fraquet had a tendency to keep the game in his own hands, to play with his idea while the others waited. He had a habit of monologue, though quick at repartee also when interrupted by one of the three girls who were the owners of the flat. Raymond Fraquet's wife sat rather outside the circle of quick exchange, and when she put in a few quiet words, now and then, they were always words of restraint or of protest against a wild flight, and once or twice she challenged her husband's theories, and pricked a conceit with a pointed phrase of common sense. It was an amusing contest of wit, rather exciting to Madge le Dreux it seemed, who leant forward, listening with bright, burning eyes.

"Well, all this has been very jolly," said Bertram Ordish. "Let us lie triumphantly like the soldier in the 'Cloister and the Hearth,' and say '*le diable est mort!*'"

He turned to Madge le Dreux, and said, "It is the witching hour of night, and I have a ghost to meet. You have told me many things I like to hear. I shall remember them and tell them to my big family."

He leant down and held her hand for a moment. Then he kissed hands to the company and left the room.

Raymond Fraquet was taken to his vacant place by the side of Madge le Dreux, John was placed next to Mrs. Fraquet. A new guest arrived with a violin. It was the young man in the opposite flat on the ground floor, whom John and Madge had seen coming out one night in evening-clothes. He played fantastic melodies on throbbing strings, with his black hair falling over his brow. Bernadine Brett handed round cakes and sweetmeats. Another girl came in and recited a passionate little sketch, breaking her heart, as it seemed, when the last words were said, and then sinking on to the sofa with a gay laugh, and a cry of: "I'm as hungry as a hunter. Come and feed me, some good soul."

It was getting late. Madge le Dreux rose and left Raymond Fraquet, who said, as she left him:

"Why go? It is early yet, and you interest me."

"Oh," said Madge, whose eyes were still burning very brightly now, "John and I are not used to the late hours of London life. We are early birds to roost and rise."

John le Dreux was sorry when his sister gave the signal.



He regretted this interruption of a conversation with Mrs. Fraquet. For the last half-hour they had been talking in low voices while the violin was wailing its way through the dim woods of a dream world. Phillida Fraquet knew the Yorkshire Moors. As a girl she had lived for a time in a farmhouse not far from Swalebridge. The thought of the open country, she said, made her pulse beat. In her London fifth-floor flat she sometimes felt like a wild bird in a wicker cage, hung up on a peg above the crowd.

"Raymond's work," she said, "makes us stay in London, and, in spite of his fancies about a free life in the heart of Nature, he is a true cockney, and loves the chimney-pots and the noise of streets."

She had looked across to her husband when she had spoken these words. He was talking monologues to Madge, and Mrs. Fraquet was silent and thoughtful for a moment. Then she turned to John le Dreux, putting her hand for one moment on his sleeve:

"What a beautiful sister you have," she said. "She is like a wood nymph. How sad to bring her down to London, and into the fretfulness of London life."

John had laughed at that, and had given Mrs. Fraquet some insight into his sister's nature, into the secret of her restlessness, and of her passionate desire for the larger life.

"Yes, I understand," said Mrs. Fraquet. "I had the same ideas. But one soon sees the narrowness of what is called intellectual society. It is all so vain and foolish, and discontenting. We play with ideas; but they skim on the surface of things, and have no depth. We are all very conceited of our intellectuality. But it amounts to very little, after all."

She smiled at John le Dreux as though she had been speaking too seriously, and, perhaps, with too much revelation.

"Not that I am an intellectual. I have no brains—only feelings. I think with my heart, and not with my head."

John le Dreux thought over this, and while he thought his eyes rested on the woman with the black hair loosely coiled and the Madonna face above the full white throat, with its circlet of pearls.

"That is rather a dangerous way to think," he said.

She looked swiftly at him as though surprised by his understanding.

"Yes. It hurts sometimes."

It was then that Madge had signalled to him to go. He rose unwillingly. He would have liked to go on talking to Phillida Fraquet. She was unlike the others, with their rattling ideas and quick laughter, and her voice had a kind of thrill in it which stirred some responsive chord in his own nature.

A touch of provincialism made him gauche when he said good-night.

"We are neighbours, Mrs. Fraquet. Perhaps I shall have the pleasure——" he hesitated, and was embarrassed.

"We are sure to meet," she said simply. "This flat is Liberty Hall, and the girls welcome all who come for coffee. Besides"—she looked across at Madge with a smile of tenderness, as though the sight of her were pleasant—"I hope to make a friend of your sister if she will let me call and have her all to myself one day."

When John shook hands with the three graces of the flat who had been his hostesses, each one had something to say to him.

Winifred Vernon, the story-writer, said, "You remind me curiously of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's heroes, Mr. le Dreux—the strong, silent man, don't you know?"

She was quizzing him with frank, good-humoured impudence; and he answered with a laugh, and said:

"Yes, I am a dull dog in a drawing-room."

Bernadine Brett, the journalist, said, "Is a ticket any good to you for a lecture on Socialism, by Hilary Bullock? If so, I will send it round."

"Oh, thank you," said John. "But I am rather busy just now."

Patsy, the artist girl, held his hand just long enough to make him slightly embarrassed.

"I am giving a one-man's show in the Chelsea Gallery. Won't you come, and bring some of your friends? It's my most ambitious attempt to get a little fame. If you have any newspaper friends, *do* send them, please! Bernadine, though a journalist, will not lift a little finger to use her influence."

"I have no influence," said Bernadine, "and I have seen the pictures."



These last words caused an outburst of laughter, and at the end of it John and Madge said good-bye, and went downstairs to their own flat.

"Queer people," said John, at the bottom of the second flight.

"I shall never sleep to-night for thinking of them all," said Madge le Dreux.

## CHAPTER V

A FEW days after the evening in the flat upstairs Madge le Dreux was reading in her drawing-room, when she heard the electric bell go pinging in the hall. A moment later the maid came into the room and said:

"If you please, miss, there's a young lady wishing to speak to you."

Madge put down her book—it was a collection of essays by Raymond Fraquet, cynical, fantastic, morbid, playful, in which she seemed to see the moods of that good-looking man with the longish fair hair, and the blue-grey eyes, by whose side she had sat for half an hour or so, and whose conversation had been curiously like this book, except that between covers his monologues were not interrupted by lively young women with a highly developed sense of humour.

"What is her name?" said Madge.

"Beatrice, I fancy, miss. She belongs to No. 31. It's the young lady what set fire to the flat a while ago, all along of reading in bed."

"Good gracious!" said Madge. "Well, show her in."

She expected to see a woman novelist, or a woman journalist, or a woman artist, who had no doubt come to leave a card, and to talk about her own artistic productions. She had had two or three such callers. But Mary brought in a child of thirteen or so, in a short white frock, with long legs in black silk stockings, and high-heeled shoes.

"Good-afternoon," said this young lady. "Mr. Bertram Ordish sent me round to say that he is giving a garden-party to-day, and he would be much obliged if you would accept an invitation, as he cannot get enough children."

Madge le Dreux laughed at this message, while the child stared at her very gravely and observantly.

"Am I to be one of the children? And where is Mr. Ordish's garden? I thought none of these flats had gardens."



The girl in the short white frock and long black stockings answered the second question.

"It is on the roof. He has made quite a ripping little garden up there. He has asked me to say, also, that if you have any white mice, or tame rats, or anything of that sort he would be glad if you would bring them with you, as it is a menagerie garden-party."

"But I haven't!" said Madge, laughing again, "only Corydon, a sheep dog."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said the girl, quickly but politely. "Dogs are not allowed, as there are quite a number of cats. It might lead to bother, you know."

It was very gravely said, but Madge thought she saw the flicker of a smile in the child's eyes.

"That is true," said Madge. "It might. Well, am I to come now, and just as I am?"

"You might put on a hat if you like," said the little girl. "But if it's a pretty one, I advise you not to, as the smuts are rather thick. I should say just as you are, if you don't mind."

Madge accepted the advice, and was led by her polite and serious little guide up the five flights of stone stairs in her own block of mansions, then up a short flight of wooden stairs which gave access to the flat roof, and then over a desert of asphalt and through an avenue of chimney stacks to the far end of the block. There was time on the way for conversation.

"I had no idea there was such a place as this above our heads," said Madge. "Certainly the view is glorious over the park there. And how funny the people look down in the street—like little crawling ants!"

"That's what Mr. Ordish says," said the little girl, "'And don't you forget,' he says, 'that the ants are just as important to themselves as we are, and quite as clever.'"

"Yes, that is just what Mr. Ordish would say," said Madge.

She asked her small friend's name and learnt that it was Beatrice Delacomb.

"Perhaps you know the name of Delacomb?" said Beatrice. "My father is a dramatic critic by night, on *The Planet*, and by day he reviews books and things. He is very clever, but I don't care for his style of work myself. I prefer poetry."

"Were you reading poetry when you set the flat on fire?" asked Madge.

The little girl looked at her sharply. "I suppose somebody has been telling you all the news? People *are* fond of tittle-tattle, don't you find?"

Madge was crushed by this rebuke, and changed the conversation by saying:

"How much farther to Mr. Ordish's garden-party?"

"It's just behind that line of washing," said Beatrice Delacomb. "Where that Union Jack is tied to the chimney-pot."

A few yards further on Madge dived beneath the washing, getting tangled up for a moment in a pair of pyjamas, whose legs, were dangling ridiculously in the breeze, and then found herself at the front entrance of Mr. Ordish's garden.

It was bounded on the east by a row of flower-pots in which nasturtiums were blooming with remarkable vigour, on the west by a rope (tied between two distant chimneys) from which hung at least a dozen Chinese lanterns with lighted candles, although the sun was shining; and on the north and south by the parapets from which one could look down on one side to Royal Avenue, on the other into Park Road, that is to say, into the street of Intellectuals, and into one of the worst slum streets in South London.

In the centre of this square a snow-white table-cloth had been spread on the asphalt floor (which was also a roof), weighted against the efforts of the breeze, which blew briskly at that altitude, by a goodly display of cakes, tartlets, and sweetmeats, to say nothing of fifteen cups and saucers, and a big tea-urn. Twelve cats sat on twelve footstools (evidently collected from twelve flats) looking patient and resigned but rather self-conscious in these positions of dignity. Occasionally one or other of them got down, prowled round the edge of the table-cloth, but afterwards slunk back to the footstool. Evidently they were well-trained cats, not only because they sat so meekly, but because they entirely refrained from any attack upon small creatures who would have been tasty morsels to them. There was a family of white mice, for instance, within easy reach of them in a basket strewn with straw, and on one of the parapets were six cages in which a variety of birds, canaries, linnets, and chaffinches, sang merrily in chorus. A solitary lop-eared



rabbit sat in a wooden hutch nibbling a lettuce, two guinea-pigs poked their noses through the bars of another wooden house, and a squirrel whirled round and round unceasingly in a revolving swing, in a wire cage. Here, then, was the menagerie.

Madge rubbed her eyes and felt strangely like Alice in Wonderland. This tea-party was not less remarkable than that of the Mad Hatter. For what were all the children doing, and where was the host of the untouched feast? There were about twelve or fifteen children from four to thirteen years of age, who were rushing about from one chimney-stack to another, crying, "Where is he?" "Where can he have gone to?" Peering down the stairways which led to the flats below, looking behind wicker chairs, and even staring into the air as though they expected to see somebody on an aeroplane or a broomstick.

"Well, all I can say is," said a round-faced boy of ten or eleven, "it's a jolly mystery. I saw him creep along this way, and duck under the washing. So you see he must be somewhere between those pyjamas and the end of the block."

"I b'lieve he's witched himself," said a young lady of seven.

"Who is *he*?" asked Madge.

"Why, Mr. Ordish," said the plump boy. "Have you seen him by any chance? It's a game of hide-and-seek, you know; and, by Jove! he does find ripping places!"

"I should think he jolly well does," said a pale-faced youth in an Eton suit. "We lose him every time."

Then there was a general shout, a great clapping of hands, and shrieks of laughter, for Mr. Bertram Ordish suddenly appeared on the scene, saying very coolly:

"Well, you've lost the game. Time's up, and my turn to hide again."

He appeared, head first, like a Jack in the box, from the funnel of a very black chimney-pot, a foot higher than Madge's head, and just behind it. At the sound of his voice she turned round and gave a little shriek like one of the children.

"Good-afternoon, Miss le Dreux," said Bertram Ordish politely, as he raised himself very carefully with both hands on the rim of the chimney-pot, and then, with an excellent

spring, jumped out on to the asphalt roof. "You see what I do to amuse my guests! Here is a good suit of clothes utterly ruined. However, I won the game right enough!"

Madge sat down on a wicker chair and laughed until the tears came into her eyes, and peals of laughter from the children joined her in chorus, for Bertram Ordish, novelist, looked like a professional chimney-sweep. There was a black smudge of soot down his right cheek, his hands were quite black, and his blue serge suit was begrimed all over.

"It is no laughing matter," he said seriously. "What would have happened to your uncle if a fire had been burning below?"

"Oh, you would have browned beautifully, Mr. Ordish," said Beatrice Delacomb.

"I believe you would not shed a single tear over my roast meat," said Bertram Ordish; and then to Madge, "It was good of you to come. You must be the mother of my family and pour out tea. Now I will dive below and do a quick change. Good lord! what will my old housekeeper say when she sees my disreputable appearance?"

With a wave of the hand he disappeared down one of the roof doorways. But not for long. Before Madge, taking command of the party, had arranged the guests round the edge of the table-cloth, giving the wicker chairs to the most miniature of the ladies and making the others sit on their pocket-handkerchiefs and the asphalt roof, Bertram Ordish was upon the scene again, washed clean of soot and in an old suit of grey flannel.

"This is a moral lesson to you, my children," he said. "How many of you could wash and change in four minutes, thirty-five seconds and a half, by a stop-watch?"

He made himself immensely busy with the ceremony of the tea, issuing commands with an air of dictatorship which was not to be disobeyed.

"In this garden," he said, "the smallest and the weakest are always helped first. Therefore Tiny Tim begins the feast." He put his hand into his pocket and, to the great delight of the children, pulled out a little grey mouse, which ran up his arm and on to his shoulder.

"No cheek, master Tim," said Ordish. He lifted it down between thumb and finger and gave it a morsel of



cake to eat. Afterwards it hid itself under a corner of the table-cloth.

"Now then, Beatrice, three lumps of sugar for the Snow-drop family."

Beatrice took the three lumps as desired to the white mice in the basket of straw.

"And now," said the genial host, "all the gentlemen must wait on the ladies. I mean the lady cats. Who will be unselfish and go without saucers?"

There was a general shout of "I will."

"Very well," said Ordish, "we will all go without saucers in the interest of our feline friends. Miss le Dreux, dispense the milk."

Twelve saucers were filled and placed by four small boys before the twelve footstools on which sat the twelve cats, who blinked at them and licked their whiskers but did not budge.

"You will observe, Miss le Dreux, that our cats are very well behaved. I had a lot of trouble to make them say grace before meals."

He miaowed to them in a language which they understood perfectly it seemed, for nearly every one gave an answering "miaow."

"That means 'Amen,'" said Ordish, as the cats now descended from their seats and lapped the milk with hearty appetites.

"Having seen to the wants of our weaker brothers and sisters," said Ordish, "we will now fall to ourselves. Who says cake?"

No one said cake and there was a self-conscious and amused smile on the faces of the children.

"Oh," said Bertram Ordish, "how well brought up we have been, to be sure! In well regulated nurseries it is a rule to begin with bread and butter. I was always taught that myself when I was quite young, about three hundred and fifty years ago."

It was a merry meal and the tall man, going bald on the forehead, and with a powerful clean-cut face, and whimsical mouth, was the biggest child among them. Indeed, as Madge le Dreux remarked (though not in words), some of these children were not quite childish enough. Like Beatrice Delacomb, the young lady with the long black stockings, they had a gravity and politeness beyond their years, and

regarded the comical behaviour of Bertram Ordish with an air of superior and condescending amusement, as they would have smiled at the antics of a very small brother.

One little woman in blue, not older than eight years it seemed, was an exact type in miniature of a professional lady with a soul for art and a society manner.

"How charming!" she said, when with her dainty little fingers she selected a cracker from a box handed to her by her host. And when she pulled it with Beatrice Delacomb, wincing a little before the report came, and then taking out a pink cap, set it upon her smooth gold hair, she said in an affected little voice:

"It does not go very well with my blue frock, do you think? Mother always tells me that pink and blue do not harmonise."

"What a blithering idiot her mother must be," growled Bertram Ordish, *sotto voce* to Madge le Dreux.

The other children had now put on paper caps, and though there was laughter and clapping of hands among the smallest of them, two or three more elderly little women were like the child in blue, somewhat concerned with their personal appearance.

One small boy, with a serious and pale face, who had eaten very little for tea, and had kept his eyes fixed steadily on Bertram Ordish, as though he were a wonderful being, who did the most extraordinary and unexpected things, now asked a peculiar question.

"May I go away and play by myself?" he said. "I want to think out a plot about the soldier's cap."

"No, you don't, Master Peregrine," said Ordish. "None of your father's nasty habits are allowed on this roof. Do you know what will happen to you if you think out plots and don't play with other children?"

"I expect I shall become a novelist, like father," said the boy. "He always likes to be alone when he thinks out plots."

"Oh, does he?" said Ordish. "Well, that's what you will become—a novelist. A fellow who sits indoors all day while the sun is shining outside! Now, wouldn't you rather be a bus-driver, with a nice long curly whip, and two white horses?"

"Father says literature is the only thing worth living for. He likes me to think out plots."



"Well, I shall come and talk to your father," said Ordish. "Plots are the very worst things in the world for pale-faced boys. Literature! Be hanged to it! Let's have an egg-and-spoon race. There's life in that!"

He turned to Madge le Dreux. "You have no idea what a trouble I have with these little old men and women. They have all been suckled on six-shilling novels."

For the egg-and-spoon race Ordish sent down a boy to borrow twelve eggs from his housekeeper. They were never returned, for, like Humpty Dumpty, every one of them had a great fall. But the race was a big success, and real childish laughter rang out on the roof. Ordish was disqualified early in the first heats, and while the children continued the game, he walked with Madge to one of the parapets and showed her the view across the park and away over London to the far horizon of the Highgate hills.

"I shall be seeing bigger hills than that in a few days," he said. "I am off to the Pyrenees for a little mountain-climbing."

"Oh yes; your recreation," said Madge, remembering "Who's Who," and, looking up at the tall man at her side, smiled and said, "Mountain-climbing and nursing other people's babies. It is a queer combination."

"Think so?" said Ordish. "Both hobbies came from the desire to escape."

"To escape from what?" said Madge.

"From one's tiresome self," said Ordish. "There is nothing like children and the mountain-tops for self-forgetfulness."

"But some people's selves are so interesting," said Madge. "There is no reason why they should forget. It seems to me that Mr. Ordish's self should be very interesting."

"Think so?" said Ordish again, and he turned round to look with a frank gaze at her before which she lowered her eyes with momentary embarrassment. He spoke about the children again, perhaps to avoid talking of self.

"Most of these are 'one-in-family' children. Poor goblins, they were very lonely before I brought some of them together and forced them into companionship. Oh, it's damnable, this flat life, and one child to a flat."

He spoke with a sudden anger, so that Madge was startled. But in a moment he was smiling again, and said:

"When you marry, Miss le Dreux, I beg of you to have at least six children."

Madge laughed. "I can hardly imagine myself as the mother of six."

"Oh, you would be a very nice mother," said Ordish. "But, for Heaven's sake, abandon fads and theories, and let the children bring themselves up. And, above all, don't let them know anything about art or literature until they are turned fourteen."

"But I haven't got them yet," said Madge, "nor even a husband in view."

"Oh, he'll come. I tell you what it is. The people in this street would rather produce a work of bad art than a healthy child. Think of that! It is a blasphemy against life. As if their wretched little novels and foolish little plays, and senseless little newspaper articles, mattered to anybody in the wide world! They fret themselves into fiddle-strings to make what they call a 'name' for themselves, feed daily on self-conceit, and are fiercely jealous of all who make a bigger 'name' than they do. Their whole lives are spent in the unhealthy, unnatural atmosphere of 'intellectuality.' These children here—poor little prigs and minxes, most of them, until I took them in hand—are the children of the 'intellectuals,' and the victims of the worst phase of civilisation—overculture. God! how I hate the word culture!"

"And yet, Mr. Ordish," said Madge, "I have heard that you write novels."

"Oh, they are all failures," he said lightly, "and I never take them seriously. My real business in life is mountain-climbing. Whenever a new novel of mine is about to be published, I slink off, ashamed, to the mountains, regain my self-respect by climbing them, and wait until people have forgotten my latest stupidity. They forget quite quickly, thank Heaven!"

Madge suspected the man's sincerity. It seemed to her quite incredible that any man should write a novel and be ashamed of it. She would willingly have given her left arm to read the reviews of a novel by herself. But when she looked at Bertram Ordish's powerful face, with his steady, truthful eyes, and remembered his tenderness to cats and mice and little children, and saw him now in a minute or two, playing cricket with a child's bat and a flower-pot as a



wicket, scoring runs with infinite zest, she felt that his sincerity and simplicity were not to be questioned. There was something very charming and lovable in this man's nature.

## CHAPTER VI

A FEW days after Bertram Ordish's garden-party on the roof-top, Margaret received a little note from Mrs. Fraquet, enclosing two tickets for her husband's new play called *Fame*, at the New Theatre. The letter was rather curious in its wording.

"Raymond has asked me to send the tickets," said Mrs. Fraquet. "He has not forgotten his wish to experiment upon a mind so new to the impressions of the theatre as your own. I cannot help thinking that the experiment may be rather disagreeable to you. Raymond has peculiar views about the things that matter in life, false views, I am sure, but dangerous to those who have not had experience in testing them. Therefore, dear Miss le Dreux, if you would rather not take the risk, send the tickets back, and I will give them to someone already hardened to these new ideas which are the microbes of London life. It is only fair, I think, to give you this warning, and Raymond has read this letter and laughed at it, very merrily, in spite of his annoyance at my candour."

Margaret was astonished by this letter, and in her answer accepting the tickets said:

"My sensibilities are not likely to be shocked by your husband's play, dear Mrs. Fraquet. I am not so young and innocent as you seem to think. Books are cheap to-day, and knowledge comes even to the country. Thank you ever so much for the tickets. John and I will be delighted to go."

As it happened, however, John was not delighted to go. He had appointments with two patients that evening, and could not afford to neglect them. Moreover, having read Mrs. Fraquet's letter, he knitted his brow for a moment, and was thoughtful until Madge said:

"Well, what is worrying you, John?"

"It is a curious letter for a wife to write," said John.



"Don't you think? I fancy Fraquet's play must be pretty rotten in its morality, and I had an idea the other evening that the fellow himself was rather an unhealthy creature—vain, and morbid, and egotistical, and unbalanced."

He touched his sister's hand across the table, as they sat at dinner together.

"Madge," he said, "be careful, won't you? Don't go playing with fire."

She laughed at him gaily. "Serious, stupid old John," she said, helping him to a second serve of pudding. "I believe you would like to shut me up in a cage. But you are not going to. Oh no; I have been in the cage long enough. Now I am going to spread my wings and fly about to see the world, and to find out all I can about this life of ours—all the pleasant, beautiful things, and all the ugly and unpleasant things. It is good to know."

"I don't know whether it is good to know," said John, handing up his plate for a third serve of pudding. He had not yet lost his Yorkshire appetite. "There are many things which it is far better not to know—and many people. Anyhow, I warn you against Fraquet. As a medical man, I don't like the look of him. He is a highly-strung, sensitive beggar, and there is a queer light in his eyes."

"Of course, he is highly strung and sensitive," said Madge. "I shouldn't be interested in him if he were like a Yorkshire squire, with a lot of muscle and a very little brain. Intellectual people are naturally sensitive—not like you, my poor John, whose imagination would go comfortably into this salt-cellar, and have plenty of room."

She spoke with sisterly frankness, and John stared at the little silver salt-cellar as he lit a cigarette, and said quite calmly, and without a trace of annoyance:

"Yes; I don't boast of imagination. I am a fellow for facts. But it's a dangerous commodity—imagination. Whenever I come across it in a diagnosis, especially among women, I know I've got a difficult case. I have known it to be a fatal symptom."

"Oh, now you are talking in an idiotic way," said Madge.

"Think so?" said John. "I am quite serious, anyhow. Now that patients are coming in I am beginning to learn, and see things I didn't know before. I have been called up five times at night to attend women with nervous disorders, and on my list I have got one actor with melancholia

one novelist, who drugs himself to sleep or else keeps awake for a week, one journalist with acute neuritis, and three young professional men who suffer from anæmia and overwrought nerves. These cases are all within a stone-throw of this flat. Something wrong, isn't there?"

"No," said Madge, "nothing wrong. Every stage of life produces its own diseases. In Yorkshire, which belongs to the animal and vegetable stage, your patients suffered from gout, rheumatism, sciatica, and alcohol. Here, in the intellectual kingdom, they suffer from nerves—a higher type of disorder."

"The intellectual disorder is far more dangerous to humanity," said John. "It has such a bad effect upon other people's lives. A morbid man or woman casts a blight upon his fellow-creatures."

"Oh, we are not morbid," said Madge. "We are only sensitive to impressions, and excited by our own thoughts."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said John, smiling at her use of the word "we" by which his sister allied herself with her new friends. "Well, take a brother's advice and don't cultivate sensibility."

"Thank you for nothing," said Madge, with an amiable impertinence. "I am going to let my little intellect have its chance at last. So now, be a good big brother, and put off your patients to another day, and take me to Mr. Fraquet's new play."

"No," said John, "my patients are going to pay for your intellectual education, so I have got to stick to work when I have any."

This led to a brisk little quarrel. Madge tempted him and bullied him to take a night off so that he might be her escort to the theatre, and was really angry when John rose from the table and said:

"Let's drop the subject, Madge. Take somebody else with you."

She looked at his mouth, knowing how to read its signs, and saw that the lips were drawn into that straight, unswerving line, which made it useless, she knew, to argue with her brother, so, confessing her defeat, she put her hands on his shoulders, and said:

"You are a stubborn old bear, aren't you? Well, if I have to go alone, I shall go, but, meanwhile, I will ask one of the girls upstairs."



She tripped upstairs that same afternoon, and knocked at the door of the second-floor flat. It was opened by a small maidservant, with a smudge of blacking down one cheek, who, in answer to Madge's inquiry for Miss Vernon, left the door ajar, and, going back into the little hall a step or two, cried, "Miss Winifred? Miss Wini—fred!" in a shrill falsetto, which set Madge's teeth on edge.

"Drat the infant!" said a voice from a room on the right side of the passage. "How can I write a palpitating and passionate love-scene when I am interrupted by such a screech-owl? Patsy, my dear, box the child's ears."

"A lidy to see you, miss," said the maidservant. "The young person as lives downstairs with the doctor."

There was a moment's silence. Then Madge heard a little scrimmage, a ripple of subdued laughter, and Winifred Vernon's voice saying:

"Show the lady into the drawing-room, Polly, and then I will come in a moment."

But it was Patsy who came to Madge first. Patsy, the willory artist girl with the dark mystical eyes. She wore a blue overall over her dress, daubed with paint as though it had been used for wiping the palette knife which she was now carrying.

"So glad to see you, Miss le Dreux," she said, putting her head a little on one side and gazing at Madge as though studying an effect in light and shade. "Winifred is in a disgraceful state of *deshabille*. She has been writing the last chapter of a novelette in bed, and I have been using her as a model for 'The Lady of Shalott.' She looks very pre-Raphaelite in her night-gown, but will smoke cigarettes, which are rather out of the picture."

"Tell her not to bother," said Madge, laughing. "I have only come to invite her to the theatre to-night. I have a ticket for Mr. Fraquet's new play."

"That's very charming of you," said a merry voice at the door, "and if you'll excuse a dressing-gown, we will discuss this agreeable subject. . . . Patsy, my dear, tell Polly to put the kettle on and we'll all have tea."

It was Winifred Vernon who came in with a ragged red dressing-gown over her night-dress, her bare feet in felt slippers, her hair in two plaits like Marguerite, and an Egyptian cigarette dangling daintily from the corner of her mouth. She removed her cigarette between two fingers deeply stained

with tobacco juice, and, putting an arm round Madge's waist, touched the girl's cheek with her lips.

"What an abandoned dissolute, disreputable creature you make me feel," she said. "You are as neat as a new pin, my dear, and at four o'clock in the afternoon I am like a slattern in a lodging-house."

She sat down in a wicker chair and lit another cigarette from the one which she had had in her mouth.

"But you are not under the curse of having to write sensational fiction in instalments. Thank Heaven I have made my young man come to the point at last. . . . "My darling," he said, with the breath struggling fiercely from his broad chest where a diamond stud glittered in his clean white shirt, "my darling," he said, enclosing her in his strong arms, "I love you with the love of an honest man who would die for you a lingering death, who would live to make you happy, to fulfil your least behest, to give you all he has in this wide, wide world. My darling," he whispered more gently, "will you be my little wife?" Her head drooped like a flower upon his breast. "You make me very happy," she said, so faintly that he could hardly hear the words. "You make me very, very happy, John," she said, raising her face to his, and letting her lips be drawn to that first sacred kiss of love. "Thank God!" said John, and he clasped her in an embrace of death-like devotion. . . . The End. We beg to announce that our next serial will be by the same author, and entitled, "The Girl who Broke Her Mother's Heart." "

Winifred Vernon recited these words in a dramatic way, leaning back in the wicker chair with her eyes closed while she held the cigarette from her and let its smoke curl up. Then she opened her eyes and there was a smile about her lips though she looked tired and worn.

"That's how it's done," she said. "Quite easy, isn't it? But oh . . . it makes me very weary of this foolish world, very sick of myself, very ready to blaspheme against the fate which makes me write, and write, and write this interminable rubbish at ten shillings a thousand words."

A look of revolt and wretchedness was in the tired eyes of the girl whose laughter had seemed so merry to Madge le Dreux.

"What nonsense you do talk," said Patsy, the artist girl. "Ten shillings a thousand words at the rate you



turn them out is a fortune. Look at me, I paint and paint and paint and never sell a picture."

She wrung her hands with a pathetic little gesture and turned to Madge.

"You have no idea," she said, "how difficult it is to be true and loyal to one's artistic impulses. I spent years in studying at the Slade School, and now I try to put on to canvas dream pictures in which there are beauty and thought and emotion, and the divine mysticism of colour harmonies"—her own colour deepened into a sudden angry flush as Winifred laughed at her and said, "Divine humbug, my dear,"—"but I have no encouragement except the little flame in my heart, which sometimes grows dim. Even the Academy rejects me, and to pay my share of this flat I have to draw fashion pictures for a lady's paper. Oh! *Fashion pictures!*"

"That is very hard," said Madge. "How cruel life seems to be to those who write and paint. I cannot understand it. Art and letters seem to me the only things that matter."

"Oh, how glad I am to hear you say that," said Patsy, taking hold of Madge's hands and pressing them in a kind of ecstasy. "So few people understand, so few!"

"And a jolly good job too," said Winifred, flinging a cigarette end into the fender. "The only things that matter! Why, good God! if you will excuse the expression, our precious little stories and precious little paintings are the only things that don't matter! It's bread and butter and babies and bricks and mortar, and the people who make things and do things and don't write about them that really matter. Life is the thing, my sweet sisters, not the false imitation of it."

"Winifred always speaks like that," said Patsy, looking with sorrowful and reproachful eyes at her friend. "She pretends to be on the side of the Philistines."

"I look like it, don't I?" said Winifred, glancing down at her bare feet in slippers and at the tatters in her dressing-gown. "I guess old Mother Philistia would have a fit if she saw me now."

She looked across at Madge. "So you are going to Raymond Fraquet's new play and want me to come with you. Is that it?"

"Yes; I am sorry I have not more than one ticket to spare," said Madge, with an apologetic glance at Patsy.

"Oh, Patsy will stay at home and cook cocoa for me when I come in. It is her turn for fatigue duty," said Winifred.

"Then you will come?" said Madge timidly. She was not quite sure whether a theatre ticket would be looked upon as a favour by this strong-minded girl.

"Oh, I will come like a bird, and put on my very bestest best dress. Is your big brother going?"

"No," said Madge, and then laughed. "It is because he can't come that I have a ticket to spare."

"That's a pity," said Winifred. "He would be such a nice big thing to go to the theatre with, and I should like to see the effect of one of Raymond Fraquet's plays upon his simple soul."

"Are Mr. Fraquet's plays so very unusual?" said Madge.

Winifred gave a curious little laugh. "Oh no, they are not unusual—nowadays. The same old thing in fact, but they belong to what is called advanced drama. Personally I am getting rather tired of it. It's getting like one of its own women, *passée* and painted and hysterical. Still, I like Raymond, and I will certainly patronise him on a free ticket."

"Raymond Fraquet is a beautiful soul," said Patsy.

"Beautiful fiddlesticks!" said Winifred. "When will you learn that beautiful is not an adjective to be used to a masculine thing, and that to speak of a man having a 'soul' is to accuse him of nasty habits?"

Patsy answered by threatening to throw her palette knife at Winifred; but, wrapping her dressing-gown round her, the author of "Sweetheart and I" made an effective exit. A moment later she put a roguish head with flapping pig-tails round the corner of the door and said:

"I will call for you at seven, my dear, and you will find me respectable in appearance, at least."

She was more than respectable when that evening she stood in the hall of the corner ground-floor flat, and said "Are you ready?" to Madge, who came out to meet her. She was in the shimmering white dress in which Madge and John le Dreux had first seen her tripping down the flight of stairs in the half-darkness a few weeks ago, and she had an Indian shawl of sheeny silver thrown over her head and shoulders, and she looked a fairy-like thing as she stood smiling under the iron-work lantern of the square little hall.



"We shall make an excellent pair," she said, studying Madge from head to foot with a frank and good-natured stare of smiling admiration. "Blonde and Brunette, the two knockabout ladies!"

"Do you think I shall do?" said Madge. "Remember it is my first theatre, and John is useless as a critic."

"I can only admire," said John, coming out into the passage. He stood leaning against the doorpost of the dining-room and looked at the two girls gravely, but with just a glint of amusement in his eyes, at Madge, whose dark hair, loosely looped, had a red rose in its coils, and at Winifred Vernon in the silver-thread shawl.

"Admiration is so much better than criticism!" said Winifred. "As that is your talent, can you spare a little for me?"

She dropped a curtsey to him and then put back her shawl a little, glancing up at this tall, quiet man with a rather audacious appeal to his appreciation.

John studied her in a leisurely way, so leisurely that in spite of her audacity she blushed under this steady gaze.

"You look splendid," he said. "And I shall admire you vastly if you bring back Madge safely from the perils of London. I warn you that she is in a dangerously excited mood."

Perhaps he did not speak wholly in jest, for Madge was really quivering with excitement, and her eyes were sparkling with an unnatural brightness.

She put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him on the forehead as he bent his head to her.

"I feel like a bird escaping from the cage," she said.

A moment later the two girls sat side by side in a hansom cab, and Madge said:

"How jolly to drive through London when the lights are lit!"

And Winifred said, "How good to have a nice big brother at home. Why did not God give *me* a nice big brother?"

That was a wonderful drive to Madge le Dreux, in the hansom cab which went with a tinkling bell and a click-clack of hoofs and a lean-ribbed horse with a dancing humour in his hind legs. It was an October evening, and a cool breeze with a faint pungent odour as of burning wood stirred the dried leaves of the trees over the park railings. The lights in the street of flats flashed through the cab window,



and upon crossing the bridge Madge leaned forward to drink in the beauty of the river reflecting the Embankment lamps and barges, black in the darkness, but with red eye-balls glowing like living coals on the dark waterway.

"Pretty good, isn't it?" said Winifred, and Madge said, "The Thames at night!" with a thrill in her voice.

Then they were caught up in a tide of traffic streaming up the Buckingham Palace Road and through the Green Park, a tide of cabs with tinkling bells, of motor-cars sounding their horns and speeding through the park with a swirling rushing noise like a river in spate in the Yorkshire hills. Madge's watchful eyes caught glimpses of men and women in evening-dress sitting close together in these carriages, the women's faces and arms illuminated by the light of the lamps, the men's shirt-fronts gleaming white.

"Who are they all?" said Madge. "Where are they all going to in this wonderful world of London?"

"They are all going to be bored somewhere or other," said Winifred. "Some to dinner with people they detest, and some to receptions where they will trample on each other's frocks and tear each other's reputations, and some to the theatre, to plays of extreme stupidity. They are all going to do their duty in that station of life to which it has pleased God to call them—poor wretches."

"How cynical you are," said Madge, "and depressing. Can anyone be bored in London?"

"Oh, everyone," said Winifred, with positive assurance. "It is the world of the Weary Willies. We all pretend to be jolly happy, and we laugh and jabber, and show our teeth at each other in artificial smiles, and all the time we are perfectly miserable, and think what a farce it all is! That's the penalty of our civilisation."

"I haven't had enough of it yet," said Madge. "I am only beginning to be civilised. I have come from the wilds where I lived like a savage."

"Go back, my child, ere it is yet too late," said Winifred. She laughed quietly as she looked up at her companion's face and saw the dark eyes staring with a kind of solemn awe into the whirlpool of traffic in Piccadilly Circus, upon which innumerable electric lights shed a dazzling glare. Then Winifred suddenly took one of the hands which lay on Madge's lap, and held it in a warm little clasp. "Madge," she said—"if I may call you Madge—you will soon get tired



of this glitter and noise. Then you will pine to get back to the quiet old hills which you think so dreary."

"Never," said Madge. "This is life."

"Sham life and squalid life. All this white light puts a glamour on it. Underneath it is rotten and vile. Look at those girls on the pavement, there, with the glittering eyes and the carmine lips. Where do you think they are going?"

"To the theatre, I suppose, like ourselves," said Madge.

"No," said Winifred, "to hell, my dear."

Madge started, and stared again at the three well-dressed girls standing on the kerbstone, smiling in a curious way at nothing in particular.

"Oh, I see," said Madge, with a little shiver, and then was silent.

"You will see a great deal more before you are much older," said Winifred.

"I want to see," said Madge le Dreux, putting her arm upon the doors of the hansom and leaning forward with her lips half parted. "I want to see!" she said, in an eager, excited voice.

They were crawling now at the tail end of a long line of cabs and motors in a turning off St. James' Street, at the end of which the lights gleamed in the portico of the New Theatre.

"Well, we shall see Raymond Fraquet's play now," said Winifred, in a matter-of-fact way. "And a lot of good it will do us, I have no doubt."

## CHAPTER VII

WE are rather early," said Winifred Vernon, when she swept through the vestibule, said "Halloh!" to two good-looking men who lifted their crush hats to her, and let her cloak drop into the hands of an attendant in the cloak-room. "Never mind, we will study human nature in the stalls. It is always amusing on a first night."

"It is curious how nervous I feel," said Madge. "My hands are quite cold with excitement."

"Country mouse!" said Winifred, laughing at her; and then, "You look very beautiful, my dear. You will bloom like a rose in the first row of the stalls. Come along, and look haughty, as if you had paid for your ticket."

They made their way through the vestibule, now full of men waiting for ladies, or smoking their last cigarette before going to a place where men have to check an evil habit until the curtain falls on the first act. As Madge le Dreux followed her friend through the swing door, and heard the orchestra fiddling in the quest for the middle E, and the rustle of women's gowns, and the murmur of many voices, and light laughter floating down from the pit and gallery, she put a hand to her throat for a moment, and her face went white and her eyes burned with glowing fire in them. It was the first time she had come into a London theatre, and the glamour of soft light, the presence of many people, the thrill that preceeds the lifting of the curtain, stirred a strange emotion in the heart of a girl who in the quiet country had panted for the throb of human interest in such scenes as this. Listening to the wind wailing through naked branches, and to the eternal rushing of the water over the great boulders in the river-bed, or sitting with her elbows on the table and her head bent over the pages of a book upon which the words were blurred for a few moments, she had dreamed of London, of its gay crowds, of its intellectual assemblies; and now, here she was at the first night of a new play which had brought



together all the people worth knowing, all those interested in ideas and art.

A commonplace incident to most girls of her age, to Madge it was a thrilling and wonderful moment. She sat in the third row of the stalls, looking at the people scattered in the seats around her, and back and upwards at the rows of vague faces in the pit and gallery, and at two women in the stage-box over the orchestra. Who were they all?—these men who looked so distinguished in their evening-clothes, these women with their bare arms and bosoms and shoulders so bare also that she sneezed involuntarily at the sight of one immediately in front of her whose prominent backbone was displayed like a chart of anatomy on a school-room wall. Who were they all?

The question was answered by degrees by Winifred Vernon, who seemed to know most of them by sight, and when she did not know, jumped to conclusions with an extraordinary vivacity of imagination.

"See those two girls there, with white fichus round their necks? Rather distinguished-looking, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Madge. "I suppose they are celebrities of some kind, like everybody here."

"They are the two maids of Lady St. Aubrey. She never refuses complimentary tickets or complimentary anything, but when she is out of town she passes them on to the servants. I rather like her for that."

"Who are those women in the stage-box?" asked Madge. "Surely they are great ladies?"

"Rather! The wife and sister of the acting manager. Blonde Jewesses. On the other side you will see the wife and daughter of the lessee and manager. Dark Jewesses."

She pointed out various people in the stalls. Cyril Townsend, "who has the reputation of being the best dressed man in London, and gets free clothes from his tailor as a walking advertisement"; Cox, the theatrical costumier, "who began his career by holding people's noses while he talked of the weather"; Mrs. Florence Parkinson, "you remember the famous divorce case with young Lord Bellamy? That is why she gets a free ticket."

"Why?" said Madge, groping at the mystery.

"It advertises a theatre to have well-known people."

Then there was Admiral Sir Charles Bluemantle, and Mr. Quincy, K.C., and the President of the Royal Academy,



and James Bartlett, the pugilist—"such a gentle, dreamy fellow," said Winifred Vernon—and three publishers sitting in a row, but not talking to each other, and Mr. Percival Wynne, the author of the novel seized by the police, and Mrs. Wellman, the society fortune-teller, and a whole bunch of Conservative M.P.'s with their wives and daughters, and three news editors of the London papers, and the Rev. Henry Henfield, the popular preacher, and the Bishop of Porchester, who never misses a first night, and Colonel Badderley of the Guards and the captain of the Fire Brigade, and four ex-Gaiety girls with four younger sons of elderly peers, and several other actresses, not at present engaged by peers or the provinces.

"Bernadine Brett would tell you more about these people than I can," said Winifred. "She has interviewed most of them. They are people who will talk for publication on any subject that crops up. They are public figure-heads on such subjects as the Army, the Navy, the Church, Society, Fashions, Sport, or other subjects of general interest. They are all on the free list of the theatres, and never dream of buying a ticket."

"But do you mean to say everybody here is on the free list?" said Madge. "I do not understand. It seems so curious."

She was also a little disappointed. Her own ticket had seemed a treasure of great price. She had prized it as an honour which does not come to many people.

"It's all paper in the stalls," said Winifred carelessly, "every bit of it. Up in the pit and gallery there are a lot of cranks who make it their ridiculous duty to go to first nights and take themselves very seriously. You will find them all at Bernard Shaw's new play to-morrow. The women are suffragettes and anti-vaccinationists, and anti-vivisectionists. I don't blame them, but I merely state it as a fact. The men feed entirely on brown bread and cod liver oil at the Eustace Miles restaurant, and have strong views about Russia, and free-love, and the disestablishment of the Church, and socialistic legislation. They are all reformers, and most of them never have any children, even by accident."

"I never know what to believe when you talk like that," said Madge. "I think you are taking advantage of my ignorance."



"My dear child, I am telling you the sober truth, with a little literary license for the sake of emphasis. But, see, there is our distinguished author, and doesn't he look the part—my word!"

Madge followed the direction of Winifred's eyes, and saw Raymond Fraquet in one of the boxes. He was sitting back in the shadow, but his face was brightly illumined by a side light. That pale, clear-cut face, with the lock of brown hair falling over the forehead, was serious and thoughtful. Madge fancied that there was a look of sharp anxiety in the eyes which scanned the house.

"Imagine the emotions of the man," said Winifred. "For months he was shut up in his study writing out this play, irritable with Phillida if she so much as tapped at his door, and putting her beautiful head inside, said, 'How are things going, Raymond?' or 'Can you write a cheque for the butcher, dear?' I can fancy him saying, 'Damn the butcher; how can I write works of art if I am to be plagued by stupid tradespeople?' And I can fancy Phillida's look of protest at that 'damn,' which seemed so brutal to her, but was so natural and necessary to a playwright in the throes of composition. She would turn away with tears in her eyes and pray to her saints that she might still have patience. Then Raymond would come out for dinner, hilarious and excited if his pen had been running well, if he had got a good construction for the end of the Second Act, or if he had thought out a few bright lines; nervous and irritable and painfully morbid if his brain had been sluggish, or if upon reading over yesterday's work it had seemed to him hopeless drivel."

"What next?" said Madge. And then, "How do you know?"

"Then for three months or six," said Winifred, "he has been scheming to get the play produced, spending more money than he can afford on luncheons to actor-managers, and dinners to directors. They have all thought his play a 'money-maker.' They have all 'loved' it, or found it 'devilish good and daring and all that, my boy,' and, one by one, they have shelved it with a flimsy excuse, or a deliberate insult, or a dirty trick. The butcher and the baker and the tailor have all been sending in their bills, and Phillida has collected them and shown them at intervals to Raymond, who has got angry at the sight of them, and said, 'The fools



must wait until my play is produced. Curse it all, Phillida, don't you understand the situation? "

"Hush!" said Madge. "Mr. Fraquet would never speak like that. Surely he is a gentleman? "

"I think, sometimes," said Winifred, "he has kissed her hand after one of those nervous rages, and said, 'When my play is produced you shall have new gowns, Phillida. We will go to Nice, Mentone, Venice—where you will—and I shall have time to love you again.'"

"I believe you are quoting one of your own novelettes," said Madge; but Winifred ignored the jibe.

"Then the play is accepted, the contract is signed, after negotiations which seem endless, and only end because the playwright walks open-eyed into the trap of the actor-manager, preferring to be victimised as usual rather than let his play go stale before it is produced. For ten weeks now he has been rehearsing, suffering agony of soul over the stupidity of the actors and actresses who give false interpretations to the parts and false emphasis to the words, quarrelling fiercely with the leading lady who will not play in key to the others, who objects to certain lines, who at the last minute threatens to throw up her part if he insists upon cutting some lines which make a scene drag, but which put her into the limelight in beautiful loneliness. There have been other quarrels. They have raged round Raymond Fraquet—business quarrels, quarrels of pique and pride—and now, at last, there he sits, before the curtain rings up, remembering all he has done and suffered to get the play out of his brain and heart on to the boards, and wondering how the house will take it, and hiding himself in his box, a bundle of quivering nerves. Every time the house laughs in the wrong place—and it always does—he will shiver, every time a critic in the stall yawns behind a white glove, worn for a week of first nights, he will shudder with gloomy forebodings. His soul is staked upon the success of this piece. There sits the soul of the playwright. Poor wretch! Poor foolish wretch! "

Winifred Vernon had spoken this remarkable monologue with her face upturned to the box where Raymond Fraquet sat, as though reading upon his face the things which she had revealed to Madge, and, as she spoke, her voice was modulated to the music of the orchestra, and her phrases seemed to follow the rhythm given by the conductor's *bâton*.



Once, during the speech, Madge had grasped her wrist and said, "Hush! someone may hear you," and, at the end of it, she said, with a little gasp, "Why do you say such things? Surely you are not serious?"

Winifred turned to her with a curious smile. "My dear, I know these things. I know the secret history of a play's production. I have been behind the scenes, many times. And, more than that, I know Raymond Fraquet and Phillida, his wife."

"Why is Mrs. Fraquet not here?" asked Madge.

"I think she is not fond of the theatre," said Winifred.

The words were simply said, but Madge suspected a hidden meaning behind them, and searched for it. But at that moment the orchestra stopped playing with a flick of bow-strings, there was the ping-ng-ng of an electric bell, the murmur of conversation in the house died away, there was a silence in which Madge seemed to hear her own pulse-beats throbbing with a new sensation, and the curtain went up.

To Madge le Dreux the veil was lifted before a world of people who were strange to her, but whose passions, revealed nakedly and whose hearts, bleeding, and torn by self-pity, by disappointed hopes, by unfulfilled desires, made her face burn and her own heart throb almost painfully. She forgot that these men and women were merely players, representing unreal things, and counterfeiting false emotions. The illusions of the stage put its spell upon her, and more than once her eyes were filled with tears as though the artificial torture of these actors' souls were true and real.

It was a curious plot this drama which had been worked out in the brain of the man who sat back in the box half-screened by the curtain. The play opened in a poor lodging-house in London where a young actor lived during the intervals of provincial touring with a "fit up" company. He had been an Oxford man and once a gentleman, but he had half-forgotten his old ideas and habits, and his "gentility" was as frayed as the ends of his trousers and the edges of his cuffs. In this lodging-house in Waterloo Road he kept queer company, and on the night when the play began he was giving a supper-party to some of the men and women who had been with him "on the road" in provincial towns. It seemed that by some miracle—the meeting of an old college chum, who was now a leading dramatist and who had conceived the



idea that the strange personality of this young and unsuccessful actor made him the one man in the world to interpret the chief character of his new play—had at last given to Paul Vincent the chance of fame and an income greater than he could spend in a theatrical lodging-house, greater than he would need to buy sham jewellery for the girls who had been eager to give him their kisses, even without payment, and providing for the future many new shirts with unfrayed edges, many well-cut trousers many things which had only belonged to him in the old days, when he had been a gentleman.

It was curious. This prospect of clothing himself again in gentility, of picking up the old habits of respectability, of getting back again to the old set whom he had hidden from in South London and provincial lodging-houses, scared him. For years he had dreamed of fame, and cursed his degradation into the life and habits of people beneath him in birth and education and ideas. Now, when fame was within his reach, and the immediate opportunity of rising out of this squalor, he shirked it all, and was half sorry that the miracle had happened. To-night was his farewell to Queer Street, for the great dramatist had induced him to move into a West-end flat, and to go to a West-end tailor, and to play the part of a leading actor in a West-end theatre. He had even introduced Paul Vincent to his sister—a lady who had never breathed any other atmosphere than that of refinement, in her own social sphere. Paul Vincent had found it curiously thrilling and wonderful to sit at the right hand of a lady at his friend's dinner-table. The women he had known for five years had different habits of speech and very free-and-easy manners.

Some of them were in his room now for this farewell supper-party. Paul Vincent had told them his secret, and all but one girl were wild with delight at his good fortune. They made up mad tales of being whirled round by him in motor-cars, of lunching with him at the Gaiety, in expensive furs. They all clamoured to be chosen as his best "girl," like women of the harem quarrelling for the favours of the Sultan. Their shrieks of mirth, their stage slang, their utter lack of self-restraint and self-respect were reproduced with a realism that spared nothing.

But one of the girls was badly hit by Paul Vincent's words. At his revelation that this was a good-bye party she panted like a wounded animal, and then with passionate anger jeered



at him and taunted him as a man who would scorn his old "pals" when he had climbed above them. He would forget the socks she had darned for him, and the shirts she had mended. He would give her "the hard eye" when he met her in the street. That was the way of the world! He was trying to pay them now for what they had done for him when he was down on his luck. The champagne they drank was to be their receipt for all accounts rendered. Pah! She would not drink his filthy wine. She threw her glass in the fire grate and then burst into tears.

The other girls shrieked with laughter at her, and Paul Vincent, a little drunk, raised his glass, and drank to the women he had loved, to the women who loved him, to the little world in Waterloo Road which he was leaving now at the call of fame. He would never forget the boys and girls who had played the game of life with him and made it merry. Sometime he would come back to them. By God, they should always be his pals! Two of the girls had their arms round his neck, and he swayed between them, overcome by emotion and the fumes of wine. And at that moment the door opened and there came in the dramatist who had given him his chance and his sister.

The quiet man who had been Vincent's college chum, and the tall elegant woman who had never been in Queer Street before, were astonished at this scene of squalor and noisy hilarity into which they had come unexpectedly, on their way from the theatre. Paul Vincent stood ashamed before them, ashamed of his drunkenness and of his women friends, and upon the face of the dramatist's sister there was a look of disgust, and she clasped her skirts tightly as though afraid of being contaminated by the touch of the girls whose shrill laughter had been checked by her entering. These were silent now, but the curtain falls upon the exit of the dramatist and his sister when, as the door closes, the girls shriek with laughter again, and Vincent, staring after his visitors, as though he still saw the pale proud face of the tall girl who was his friend's sister, turns round and says with savage anger:

"Curse you, why can't you behave yourselves!"

The curtain went down on the first act and there was the murmur of many voices in the theatre. Two men sitting in the seats next to Madge le Dreux turned to each other with a laugh.



"Rotten construction!" said one.

"What stale rubbish!" said the other. "Utterly unreal."

They rose from their seats and made their way toward the vestibule. From the front rows of the stalls other men followed them. They all seemed to know each other, and upon their clean-shaven faces with blue chins there was a look of supercilious amusement as they nodded to each other.

"The ghouls," said Winifred Vernon, and when Madge asked for further explanation, she said, "Critics, my dear. They have gone to prop up the walls in the vestibule, to smoke cheap cigarettes, and to exchange cynical opinions on the first act and Raymond Fraquet. The bald-headed little man there will say, 'Scraggy females those, and the rottenest first act I have ever seen. Come and have a drink, my boy.' That tall boy will say, 'Fraquet ought to be put into a Home. He hasn't given us a bright line.' That grey-haired man with the grubby shirt-front and the weary eyes will say, 'I suppose he calls this realism! Oh, my God, what things are done in the name of realism! What has become of imagination, of romance, of idealism?'"

"Is that how the critics speak?" asked Madge.

"Something like that. I have overheard their intellectual converse now and then. Of course, poor wretches, they are weary and stale after watching English drama night after night for weeks and years. A dramatic critic becomes blear-eyed with boredom at the end of his first year. Some of them have been sitting in the stalls for thirty years."

Madge looked up to the box on the opposite side of the theatre.

"Poor Mr. Fraquet!" she said. "If only he could know that one person here at least is so excited by his play that her face is burning and her brain throbbing."

"Is that how you feel?" said Winifred. "Why, my dear, nothing has happened yet! I haven't begun to be interested."

"Oh, you are like the critics!" said Madge.

Yet even Winifred was interested in the acts that followed, for in the character of Paul Vincent, late of Waterloo Road and now of Pont Street, Mayfair, Raymond Fraquet had revealed a strange personality and an interesting problem in psychology. The man had played his part and the instinct of the dramatist in choosing him had been a true one. All



London thronged to see the unknown actor who had startled the playgoing world by his interpretation of *The King in Exile*, with his curiously twisted smile, his melancholy gaiety, the indefinable air of dignity which was not concealed by shabby clothes, nor lost even in his bouts of drunkenness. It seemed that Paul Vincent had been born to play the part, and the public did not tire of him soon. The play ran for a year, and the actor drew big fees. During that year he married the sister of the dramatist, that pale girl whose pride was broken down one night by the actor's passionate attack, and who, for a month or two, was pleased with an old-fashioned homage which made a queen of her, and Paul Vincent her slave.

On both sides the marriage was a tragedy. Vincent realised quickly that his wife was as cold as ice, that she hated his profession, that she despised him as a man who had lived among "low people," that she was afraid of him even, as a man whose past life concealed things from which her soul shrank. Vincent had gained fame but he had lost his liberty. The man had lived too long in Bohemianism to clothe himself again in the habits of gentility. The truth was that he was a play-actor of the old school and no longer a gentleman. His wife's friends were not his friends. He suspected that they also despised him. In his handsomely-furnished flat he was ill at ease with that elegant woman whose beauty had influenced him for a time, and whose lack of sympathy and tenderness chilled him now to the heart.

The inevitable happened. He crept away at times from the society of his own flat in Pont Street to that of the chorus girls in Waterloo Road. He found that the girl who had mended his socks when he was an unknown actor on thirty shillings a week, could alone stitch up his wounded heart now that he was a rich man and a famous one. She dropped her "h's" and used swear-words freely, but she gave all her gifts of comradeship and laughter and admiration to him with both hands. . . . Paul Vincent found consolation where it was waiting for him.

There was a terrible scene between husband and wife when, the revelation having come, each one told the truth to each other. Vincent's wife told the truth with a tongue that seemed to cut like a sharp sword, and she wounded him mortally in his vanity and in his self-respect. Then Vincent turned upon her, and in a blind passion of anger stripped the



woman naked of all her conventional ideas, of all her self-righteousness, revealing the hardness of her heart and her little narrow brain, and her utter selfishness. It was a brutal scene, scorching in its passionate cruelty of candour, and it was followed by the tragedy of the last act when Paul Vincent, deserted by his wife, discovers that he is only a one-part actor, and the fool of fleeting fame.

When the public tires of *The King in Exile* he is cast for the part of "Hamlet" in a new production and is hissed on the first night. He lives for a time on the reputation of his first success, but goes rapidly into the shade of public forgetfulness, and at last, a broken man, slinks back to the old life of the provinces, and then to the degradation of the low-class lodging-house in Waterloo Road where, as a drunken failure, he is kept by the girl who used to darn his socks.

This was Raymond Fraquet's play, and at the end of it there was loud applause from all the people on complimentary tickets in the stalls, cries of "Author! Author!" from several of them, and the ugly sound of booing in the pit and gallery.

Madge le Dreux was clapping her white-gloved hands until they hurt, and her eyes were on fire.

"Oh, splendid!" she said in a low voice. "It is red-hot with life!"

Winifred was looking at her with a little smile of wonderment and amusement.

"Think so?" she said. "It will be a dead frost, anyhow. The critics will knife it in to-morrow's papers. Look at them! There is the glitter of cruelty in their hard-boiled eyes."

The curtain went up again and again to the clamour from the stalls and still the cry came of "Author! Author!" while from the upper part of the house there came the noise of a rushing wind. The first-nighters were hissing like geese.

"I thought he would take the call," said Winifred quietly. "He could not resist it."

On the stage between Paul Vincent and the lodging-house girl stood a tall slim figure in evening-clothes. It was Raymond Fraquet who bowed in a curious, nervous way towards the stalls with the flicker of a smile. Then he looked up at the gallery from which came louder boos and harsher hissing. He stared up for a moment with a hard set face, deadly pallid in the glare of the limelight. He seemed to



defy those growls of disapproval, and to be contemptuous. Then the curtain fell, and there was the turmoil of many people thrusting towards the doors.

"How cruel! How cruel!" said Madge, white with emotion at this ending of the play. "I should like to strike some of those hissers. How bravely he faced them, and with such splendid scorn!"

Winifred Vernon put her hand on her friend's arm. "He would like to hear you say that. We will wait for him and go home together, and I will tell him."

"No," said Madge. "No."

But Winifred held to her idea, and, after lingering until the theatre was emptied, and they were the last to get their cloaks, she tripped round to the stage door.

Raymond Fraquet was just coming out. An actor's voice was speaking to him.

"How did it go, do you think?"

"Frightfully."

"Well, we will see the papers to-morrow. I hope it will be all right, for your sake, old man. Good-night."

Raymond Fraquet laughed. It was a melancholy sound. Then Winifred touched him on the arm.

"Shall we go home together?"

Fraquet started. "Halloh, you here? Yes, by all means." He saw Madge le Dreux, and lifted his hat, and a sudden look of interest quickened his glance.

"So you came, then? Did you hiss also?"

"I clapped until my gloves were torn," said Madge. And then, with a warm enthusiasm, "It was wonderful, Mr. Fraquet, magnificent!"

He laughed in a pleased, self-conscious way, and took her hand, looking at the glove.

"Why, yes, it is torn! I am glad I had one admirer."

"Two," said Winifred. "I admired the way you took your call, any way."

"But not the play?"

"No; not the play," said Winifred.

Fraquet's smile passed, and into his expressive eyes came a quick look of wounded pride.

"You are always candid," he said.

"Always," said Winifred. "It is my only virtue."

Raymond Fraquet raised his stick to a passing taxicab, and held the door open while the girls got in. Then he sat

opposite to Madge, and, as they swirled into the stream of home-going traffic, his eye rested upon her in a thoughtful way.

"So you liked it. You were not shocked?"

"Shocked!" said the girl who had come from the country. "Why shocked?"

The idea surprised her. Why should truth be shocking?

This astonishment seemed to please the author of the play. Yet, when he laughed there was a note of bitterness in his voice.

"To-morrow I shall be held up as a writer of vicious and morbid imagination, as a man who degrades drama by squalid realism. Oh, I can see those phrases in to-morrow's papers!"

"How stupid!" said Madge. "How utterly ridiculous."

"Quite so," said Fraquet. "Unfortunately, I have not learnt how to please the fools."

He was silent now, and stared out of the window of the cab, and the light from passing vehicles and electric lamps gleamed on his clear-cut profile. He looked tired and worn and his mind was evidently going over the drama of the evening. But once or twice his eyes turned to Madge and met hers, and stared into them until she was embarrassed and lowered her glance before him.

"I am glad you liked it, Miss le Dreux. I am heartened by your sympathy," he said once, and waited for her to answer; but she could find no words.

Winifred Vernon spoke now. "Mrs. Fraquet did not come?" she said quickly, and then glanced sharply at the man opposite.

"No," he said. And then, after a pause, "Phillida does not approve of the play. She is one of those who are easily shocked."

"Some of the lines were rather strong," said Winifred.

It seemed to Madge that she spoke in quick defence of Phillida.

"They were right, according to the truth," said Fraquet, and his voice was rather hard.

Except for a few casual sentences, nothing else was spoken on the way home.

But when they came into the street of mansions over the river, and Fraquet helped the girls out of the cab, he took Madge's hand, and held it in a lingering grasp.



"I shall remember that you clapped until your gloves were torn," he said.

Then he glanced at the windows of his flat, which were in darkness.

"I go home after the first night of another failure," he said, "and to a wife who has not waited up."

He lifted his hat, and went with a quick, nervous stride into the mansions.

Winifred Vernon walked with Madge to the next block of flats.

"Poor Phillida!" she said. "Thank Heaven, I have not married a playwright with advanced ideas and a nervous temperament, and no more sense of humour than a morbid girl."

## CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Madge le Dreux first came to live in the street of mansions she had been thrilled by the thought of all the unknown stories that had their dwelling-place in those great mansions, and she would not rest (she had said to John) until she got into the heart of them. That was the spirit of the girl who had come from the quiet country into the eternal tumult of London. She had searching eyes, and was curious about humanity. People excited her. The crowds of men and women in the London streets quickened her pulse. A ride on the top of an omnibus was an adventure in a new world, and even in the dusk of an autumn afternoon, when few people were about in a quiet street of dull, drab houses, she was stirred by the drama of her swift thoughts.

A dark window suddenly glimmering into a square of light as the lamp was turned up, a passing glimpse into a room where a girl was sitting before a glowing fire, a figure going up a flight of steps and rapping a light tattoo on the door-knocker, a man and woman walking slowly, arm-in-arm, through the purple twilight of the park before the gates were shut, made her shiver, sometimes with a strange little thrill which she could not explain even to herself. It seemed as if her imagination, over-excited, gave a romantic significance to the most trivial episode, or to the most commonplace character. It was the continual consciousness—curious in a young girl—that each individual in these vast crowds of London was the centre of his own little circle of humanity, that he was the father of children, the lover of a woman, a worker somewhere and somehow in the human hive, and that his heart was a bundle of those emotions and quivering nerves which made the world so wonderful and exciting to Madge herself.

She had been so long solitary that now she had a craving for society. She was restless in the flat, and when John was out—his practice was growing day by day in the street



of mansions and in the slums behind—she could not stay quietly indoors, or find any pleasure in books which had been her greatest joy, but went out for walks alone, finding a strange exhilaration in wandering through crowded streets. She would go along the highways of the shops, not interested much, as most girls are, in the exhibitions of the windows, but watching the people who thronged about like moths round bright lamps—the smartly-dressed and over-dressed women in High Street, Kensington, searching for “bargains,” and studying with sharp eyes the latest displays of hats; the elegant women of another class who stepped out of carriages and motor-cars in Bond Street, while flunkies held their rugs, and commissionaires strode forward to put a basket on the wheel; the dainty girls with big hats, and rustling skirts above silk petticoats, and little high-heeled feet, who were met by clean-shaven boys outside big restaurants; the men and women she saw in picture-galleries, talking in low voices, rapturously or languidly, over old masters, or modern impressionists.

Sometimes Madge had an almost irresistible inclination to talk to some of these people, to get their views upon life or art, to find out what they did in the world and what were their ambitions or desires. They were all so puzzling. She could not place them in a social grade. She did not know whether they were wealthy or well-to-do, whether they led virtuous lives or whether they were having the secret passionate adventures of which she had read in the novels which had been her chief mental food. To this country girl London was a great bewildering world in which she peered about with wondering wistful eyes, striving to read the riddle of it, suspecting that beneath all the tumult of life there were great mysterious forces of which she knew nothing. She was filled with vague ideas about vice and crime and love, and had a timid wish to come closer to these things so that she might get to know the truth. She was ashamed of herself and angry at her ignorance. Other girls of her age seemed to know everything. She had a lot to learn, and she was only beginning her education.

She made serious little attempts to “improve” herself. She went several times alone to the National Gallery, and stared solemnly but without understanding at the Italian primitives in the Venetian and Tuscan rooms, and with a guide-book searched out the great masterpieces of the world’s



great masters. But her attention was distracted by the people wandering round the rooms. Young, pale-faced, long-haired men, in soft hats and shabby overcoats, who gazed for ten minutes without moving at a Raphael or a Turner, set her imagination at work. The human being was so much more interesting to her than the painted canvas. She would like to know something of the soul of one of these young men. He was poor, of course, and perhaps a painter or a poet, and certainly a lover. What would it be to be loved by such a man? He would write sonnets to her, or sketch her in many attitudes, or kiss her hand, perhaps, with burning kisses.

She went to Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's, again with a guide-book, and studied the monuments and felt something of the old spirit of history creep into her with a curious thrill of awe and mystery. But here again the living people were greater than the dead. She watched how a young man and woman sat holding hands in the dim light of the aisle, how a man with speckled grey hair leant forward, with his arms over a bench and his chin on his arms, staring with grave steady eyes into the gloom of the great choir. What was passing through his brain? What were his brooding thoughts? Was he praying for forgiveness, or remembering a woman he had loved, or just resting in the quiet old sanctuary out of the tumult of the world for a while? In St. Paul's she saw young men in the back benches reading quietly in the luncheon hours while they munched sandwiches from paper bags. She was tempted to peep over their shoulders to see the titles of the books. These were young clerks from City offices. She guessed that they were reading Tolstoy, or Ibsen, or Nietzsche, or H. G. Wells, or Fabian tracts, or works of social philosophy, which bred in them a spirit of revolt against the narrowness of their own environment and the limitation of their desires, and their stinted share of life's beautiful things. She was sorry for these shabby young men, and would have been surprised to know that some of them at least were reading detective stories, and erotic novelettes, in the dim religious light of the great cathedral, and that so far from being discontented they were almost at the height of their ambition in having thirty shillings a week, and clerical respectability, which had lifted them one degree higher than their father's grade of life.

Madge was not conscious that some of these people were



interested in her. She did not know that in the picture galleries the pale young men with the long hair and the soft hats stared at her when she was trying to understand the magic of the old masters, and wondered who the girl might be, with the big brown wistful eyes, the heavily pencilled eyebrows, the oval face with the pointed chin, the dark brown hair coiled loosely under the broad felt hat, and the look of a wood nymph who had strayed from some dim glade into the haunts of a great city. She did not know that in St. Paul's the young city clerks looked above their books at her, attracted by this solitary girl with the restless eyes and a pretty air of bewilderment and expectancy as though she were waiting for things to happen, or for someone to arrive.

This—if they read this look on her face—was one of the secrets of Madge's heart which she herself could not understand, though dimly conscious of its mystery. Since she had been in London she had had a feeling of expectancy, which sometimes made her draw a quick breath, and put her two hands to her bosom, when she was alone, to quieten the throbbing of her heart. She was waiting for things to happen, for someone to arrive, though what was to happen and who was to come were unanswered questions. But in her walks through London it seemed to her that some of these people, someone in these great crowds would enter sooner or later into her own life. She could not stand for ever aloof from them. She would be drawn into the great drama and play a part in it.

That was her desire. To play a part with the other people, to do the things they were doing instead of waiting and watching ; to be someone instead of nobody. Perhaps it was her girlish vanity, the craving to be lifted out of nonentity. But it is probable that Madge le Dreux had a strength of character and an activity of intellect which needed to exercise an influence upon other hearts and brains. Opportunities being given, this country girl, who had been so cramped in a narrow sphere, might have been one of those women in society who pull the strings of politics, modifying or stimulating the ideas of the men about them, and having adventures of intellectual friendships and now and then of passion with men who call themselves leaders in the world of affairs, but who often follow the cue given by women with eyes like Madge, and with an active brain like hers, and with emotions quick in response to an appeal for sympathy.



So far these opportunities had not been given to her in the street of mansions. She had a grudge against John, who liked the warmth of his own fireside when he was not trudging about to relieve the aches and pains of patients in Park Road and the flats. The glamour of the theatre never tempted him, and he deliberately and determinedly shirked the opportunities that sometimes came to enter into new circles of society.

So Madge was thrown upon her own resources, and found them too limited at first. Yet by degrees her circle of acquaintanceship was enlarged, the door-knocker of her flat was used more often, other doors were opened to her, and she began to see more clearly into the lives of people who stood as types of certain phases of society in London. Raymond Fraquet, for instance, enlightened her a little, and puzzled her also. The first time she met him after the performance of his play, was, as it happened, on the next afternoon. She had breakfast in bed that morning, with a splitting headache after the night's excitement, and John, who had brought her tea and toast, cooked by his own hands before the sitting-room fire, had sat on her bed-side, studying her in a professional manner, and reprovably.

"This is what comes of plunging into the dissipation of London life," he said. "Dark rings round the eyes, a tongue like a nutmeg-grater, and a pulse under normal. I see you in the first stages of incipient intellectualism, my dear Madge."

He spoke jestingly, yet with a touch of gravity. Madge threw a pillow at him in reply, and upset the tea, and then jeered at him when he wiped it up with a clean pocket-handkerchief. So they had not quarrelled, though she confessed to an "early morning" temper. After that, John went off to his dispensary in the Park Road, and came home only for a hurried lunch before trudging on his rounds.

So Madge was left alone, with only the small maid in the kitchen. But to-day she was not lonely, nor tempted to the crowded streets. She had gone out to a stationer's shop and bought all the morning papers, and had come back with an armful. The sheets lay littered about the floor now, and she knew that, so far as critics have effect, Raymond Fraquet's play was a failure. She had read their criticisms with her two thick eyebrows closely knitted. Those columns and half columns of dramatic criticism had made her really angry, and stung her with sharp indignation.



These clever writers had been very clever at the expense of Raymond Fraquet, and the sting of it was in the truth. Even Madge could hardly deny to herself that their pens seemed to pierce straight to the heart of what was weak and false in that play which had held her in a spell. She knew for the first time the meaning of "deadly criticism." These newspaper writers had made a poor, bruised and battered thing of Raymond Fraquet's drama of *Fame* and there was no life left in it. They had analysed it, dissected it, torn it to tatters, and, like Spanish toreadors, had pierced the corpse with pointed shafts, from which hung the coloured ribbons of ridicule.

Some of the phrases were subtle in their attack upon the author of the play, with sharp irony concealed in courtesy. "Mr. Fraquet has written many brilliant plays, and some of the lines in *Fame* startle one by their cleverness. But when will Mr. Fraquet be less brilliant and less clever, more wise and more sincere? The insincerity of this plot is almost audacious. It deceives us almost into believing that there must be some underlying allegory, some profound moral which we have missed; or perhaps the author has written it with a subtle sense of humour and we have been wrong in dealing with it seriously. Good heavens! Can it be a satire on the stale old melodrama? But no, we have searched for the profound moral and find only a squalid intrigue between a weak man and a coarse girl. We have tried to obtain a glimpse of some glint of humour, but have gained only a deeper depression of spirits. If Mr. Fraquet has been allegorical or humorous, he has concealed his ideas too cleverly."

Other writers attacked the morality of the play from the point of view of conventional virtue, and took the part of the wife against the husband who sought consolation in the low-class lodging-house.

"Paul Vincent, the actor," said another critic, "was one of those 'misunderstood' gentlemen, craving morbidly for 'sympathy,' and expecting from their wives continual adulation. Modern wives have not this old-fashioned gift of homage, but men have no right to make that an excuse for quite commonplace vice. Mr. Fraquet has pointed out the weak spot in temperamental creatures of Paul Vincent's breed, but it is unfortunate that he endeavoured to win public sympathy for such twisted souls."

Madge, having read many of these critiques, crumpled up the paper which contained the last piece of cruelty, and let it fall upon the carpet while she stared into the fire thinking again of the author of the play as she had seen him sitting in the shadow of his box. What must he be thinking of the newspaper condemnations?

The man himself came to answer the question. There was the sharp ring of an electric bell in the kitchen, and a moment later, the little maid appeared, and said, "Mr. Fraquet, miss," in her squeaky voice.

Madge gazed round desperately at the litter of papers. It was impossible to hide them now, under the sofa or elsewhere. Raymond Fraquet would know that she had been reading the verdict of his judges.

He came in, smiling, a slim figure in a frock overcoat with a broad velvet collar.

"I have called for one moment only. Will you accept these flowers, and in return give me something?"

Madge took a slender bunch of lilies of the valley and laid them against her breast for a moment with a touch of tenderness.

"They are beautiful," she said, looking down at them. She was surprised by this gift, and fluttered with a sudden nervousness.

"Will you give me what I ask?" said Raymond Fraquet.

"I?" said Madge. "What can I give you?"

"I want the gloves you tore last night."

Madge's laughter hid her nervousness. "A torn pair of gloves! What use would they be?"

"I should like to keep them," said Fraquet quietly. "They will remind me of one friend in the theatre last night."

"It will seem so silly of me to give them to you," said Madge.

Fraquet insisted that they would give him pleasure. Then he touched one of the crumpled newspapers with his foot.

"So you have been reading these cruelties?"

He asked the question with a smile, but Madge noticed that he crunched the paper under his boot as though he would crush out the sting of it.

She hardly knew what to say, and then was ashamed of her simple words.



"I am so sorry. I hope they have not hurt you too much?"

He drew a quick breath, and put his head back a little, as though his courage had been challenged.

"Good heavens, no! I do not allow them to hurt me. These things are written by illiterate journalists, men utterly incompetent to criticise life or drama. If it had been a musical comedy with suggestive lines and indecent dances, they would all have praised it."

"These things are riddles to me," said Madge. "I do not understand. I only know that your play stirred me very much last night. It seemed so real, so true to life."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Fraquet. "That is what these fool-critics do not and will not see. They think I ought to write to please *them*! I write for men and women who do not go to a play to analyse and dissect, but to have their imagination quickened and their hearts stirred by some drama of humanity. The public are my judges, not the critics."

"Oh, then the critics do not matter," said Madge eagerly. "The public will go to the play anyhow, and, if you please them, the play must be successful."

"Yes," said Fraquet. But after a moment of hesitation, "Unfortunately the critics warn the public off, and prejudice their opinion."

He had said that he would stay only a moment, but he sat on a low chair by the fire. The warmth of it, and perhaps, also, the glow of Madge's admiration, and her dark, expressive eyes, as she spoke of his play, seemed to brighten his spirits. She was glad that he did not expect any words from her, for she felt curiously ill at ease. But he spoke very freely of his work and ideals. He told her of the immense pleasure that a man gets out of his own imagination, out of every creative work which has only art as its object and end.

"The world," said Fraquet, "measures us up by its own standards of success. How much money does a man get out of a play? If a lot, then he is a great dramatist. How much is he paid for a novel? If he draws big royalties, then he is a great genius. But one who works for art measures things differently. A play may run a week only, but it may have a message which will last a lifetime and have an influence on life. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Madge. "Perfectly."

A little later, he said, "My best happiness is in this play-writing. Financially I have been a failure, but I have gained a certain name in the intellectual crowd. I shall be mentioned in the modern school of drama when the history of it comes to be written. Bernard Shaw, Pinero, Barker and I have been the leaders of the new movement."

Then, in a little while, he said. "Sympathy! That is the one atmosphere in which a man can do any good artistic work. He must have people about him, women, above all, who will safeguard him from the stress and squalor of life, and believe in him."

He rose after these words, and, smiling at Madge, held out his hand.

"That is why I have been delighted by this quiet half-hour listening to your conversation, Miss le Dreux. You have a woman's best gifts—tenderness and sympathy. I believe we should be good friends."

"I should be very proud of your friendship," said Madge. "But I am so ignorant—I know nothing."

"Ah! ignorance. That is rare, nowadays, when women know too much," said Fraquet. "Innocence, simplicity, sympathy. What are better than those things?"

He held her hand for a moment and bent over it, in a charming, boyish way, a lock of his fair brown hair, in which there were a few silver threads, falling over his forehead.

"Is Mrs. Fraquet well?" asked Madge, in a conventional way.

"Phillida?" he said. "Oh, very well, I think. She is getting interested in this Suffrage movement, by the way. I am sorry for that."

When he had gone, Madge, with her hands on the mantelshelf, stared into the fire for almost an hour. Raymond Fraquet's conversation had excited her. His self-revelation had been so quick and intimate and generous, extraordinarily generous to a girl like herself, who knew nothing of the ideas and ideals of the society in which he moved, the world of art and letters in which he had a high name. What he had said about the creative instinct thrilled her. Yes, she could understand the joy of giving expression to the secret thoughts of the soul, to the subtle emotions of the heart. He had talked about sympathy and praised her for it, though she had said little else but "Yes" and "No." But it was true; she could have a quick and vivid sympathy with the man who



had devoted his life to art, in spite of discouragement and worldly failure. She was ready to give him all her sympathy. Then, suddenly, it flashed into her thoughts that Raymond Fraquet had hinted at lack of sympathy elsewhere. She remembered now other little hints of things in the behaviour of the husband and wife in the flat upstairs. Mrs. Fraquet's absence from the play, her curious letter, Winifred Vernon's words, the darkened window-panes last night when Raymond Fraquet had glanced up and said, "I go home after a failure and to a wife who has not waited up!"

All this suggested a troubled married life, and, as Madge pondered over this she remembered the theme of the play—the actor whose wife hated his profession, and who was so cold to him that he sought warmth elsewhere. The thought startled her. Could it be that in *Fame* Raymond Fraquet had revealed in an allegory the secret of his own life? The thought grew in her mind until the suggestion seemed almost a certainty. But she thrust it away from her as a dangerous thought, not to be lightly entertained. She busied herself in tidying up the papers which littered the floor. Then she remembered that Raymond Fraquet had gone without the gloves for which he had come. He had forgotten to ask for them again. She laughed at that, but was disappointed, and before John came home that night she slipped the gloves into an envelope, and posted them in the pillar-box which stood just below the Fraquet's flat.

It was curious that Madge's next visitor was Mrs. Fraquet. She came to pay the call which she had promised when the brother and sister had first met her in the flat upstairs. After the conversation with Raymond Fraquet, Madge was a little afraid of this beautiful woman who held his secret, whatever it might be. Indeed, she had a vague feeling of hostility and antagonism against the wife of that good-looking, boyish, sensitive man who had appealed for sympathy at her fireside.

Yet it was impossible to be cold or "distant" to Phillida Fraquet. She had a melting graciousness, very winning to a girl like Madge, whose reserve was quickly broken down. Her way of taking both hands instead of one, and holding them for a moment, while she begged forgiveness for not having called before, was charming and unconventional in its friendliness.

She looked more girlish when she slipped off her white

furs, and, kneeling down before the fire, held her hands up to the warm flames.

"How cosy you are here!" she said. "When March comes, however cold the wind, I economise over coal. Only Raymond has a fire in his room. He gets chilly when he sits writing. I keep myself warm by bustling about."

She spoke of her husband several times.

"Raymond is to be entertained to dinner at the Ladies' Academy Club. They make a hero of him there, and he likes being fussed over. Most literary men do, I find."

"Are literary men different from others?" asked Madge.

"Oh yes, quite different," said Mrs. Fraquet. "Let me warn you never to marry a man of letters."

"Why?" said Madge.

"Oh, it makes marriage so much more difficult."

She laughed, but pressed her forehead with the palms of her hand, as though the thought made her head ache.

"But I think I shall, if I get the chance," said Madge quickly. She laughed also, and then blushed a little at her impetuosity.

"Will you?" said Mrs. Fraquet, turning round to look at her with wondering eyes. "But then, you do not know."

"I do not know what?" said Madge.

"You see, when a woman marries," said Mrs. Fraquet, "she wants a man, not a novelist or a playwright."

"But are they not men also?"

"Not quite," said Mrs. Fraquet. "They are typewriters with temperaments. A woman wants something else. A woman wants the gifts of wifehood, not a well-constructed plot or a romantic novel."

"But she has her husband as well as the novel or the play," said Madge.

"My dear," said Mrs. Fraquet, "literary men spend such a lot of time in their own rooms thinking out plots and characters and ideas. So, you see, the wife is rather lonely, and outside the door she listens to the scratching of a pen and to the groans of a man struggling with the birth of a new idea. That makes her rather wretched. She can do so little to help him."

"Surely," said Madge, "there can be nothing more beautiful than intellectual comradeship."

Mrs. Fraquet patted Madge's hands. "Beautiful old words! But suppose the wife's intellect, if she has any,



poor soul! leads her to different conclusions about the things that matter in life?"

"What things do you mean?" asked Madge.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Fraquet evasively. And then she turned round to Madge and put her hand on her wrist.

"I hate intellectual conversation! Let us discuss the servant problem, like dear, stupid suburban women, or frocks and blouses, like frivolous girls, or, better still, tell me about your nice big brother whom I see going on his rounds to cure people's aches and pains. That is good, honest work."

The "big brother" came in just then, surprised and not displeased to find Mrs. Fraquet by his fireside.

The little maid brought in fresh tea for him, and Mrs. Fraquet, kneeling down on the hearthrug, made pieces of toast for him as fast as he could eat them, which was pretty fast, as it was cold outside, and he was hungry. It was a merry game, which seemed to please Mrs. Fraquet, and amused John, and they laughed together as though they were old friends, instead of this being the first call of Mrs. Fraquet to the flat. But Raymond Fraquet's wife had a simplicity which prevented all formality and stiffness. When John protested, quite truthfully, that he could eat no more toast, she wandered about the room studying the photographs of Yorkshire moors and dales, which were reminiscences of their life up North."

"Oh," she said, "the open country! How good! As soon as the first breath of spring comes I pant for the hills with the white clouds above them. But Raymond is a Cockney, and keeps close to town."

She put on her white furs as though she would go now; but she lingered a little while, sitting with her elbow on the arm of the chair and her chin propped in the palm of her hand. For a moment or two there was silence, and John, who was smoking a pipe now, looked across at the woman by his fireside, and saw how the red firelight flickered upon her face and glinted in the coils of her hair. Her thoughts seemed to be far away, and to be rather melancholy. She sighed, then awoke from her reverie, smiled again, and said:

"I must hurry back. Raymond is going to the theatre again to-night, and I have to put his tie straight and find the

collar-stud which he always loses." She looked round the room. "How cosy it is in here," she said, repeating the words she had used when she first came in. "I should like to be the sister of a doctor."

"Why?" asked Madge, laughing, with a note of surprise; and John looked up with his twisted smile and said:

"Why now, by Jove?"

"Because he is not always at home," said Mrs. Fraquet.

She blushed when the brother and sister laughed again with ringing voices, John saying the joke was very good.

"I mean," she said, "that a doctor is an active man, and when he comes home it must seem very good to him. You see, my husband is always at home in the daytime. He gets his pleasure by going out." She took Madge's hands again—both of them, as was her way. "Come round and see me sometimes," she said. "It would be a charity. I get so very tired of myself."

John was rather silent after she had gone, and puffed steadily at his pipe while he stared into the fire.

"I wonder why women fret so," he said presently. "I suppose they haven't enough to do."

"My dear, wise old John," said Madge gaily. "What a profound truth, to be sure! How startling in its novelty."

"Well, don't jibe," said John calmly. "It's a truth, anyhow, new or old."

"Certainly, it is true," said Madge. "And that is why I am going to——"

She stopped rather quickly, blushed deeply, and turned round to take a book from the shelf.

"Well," said John, glancing up at her. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, nothing," said Madge carelessly.

John puffed his pipe again, and asked no more questions. But he pondered over what the "nothing" might be. He was quite sure it was something, but not all his pondering could give him a hint.

He was quite sure that his sister was doing something unusual when, during the next week or two, he realised that Madge spent an unconscionable time in her own bedroom. She tried to hide the fact from him, but he noticed that, whatever time of the day he came in from his rounds she always came quickly from her room, singing a little song carelessly, which was always her manner when she had



something to conceal. That was a trick of hers which she had learned long ago. And he noticed that the light was burning under her door late at night. He heard her moving in her room long after he had gone to bed, and in the morning, when she came down to breakfast, there were dark rings round her eyes, as though she had not had a full portion of sleep. Also it was unmistakable that she was getting rather "fluffed" in temper or temperament, and John was the victim of it. If he read the paper at the breakfast-table, a weakness to which he was tempted, she said that it was a pity he was such a bear. When he remembered her reproof and put the newspaper under his chair, sitting upon temptation, so to speak, and made one or two cheerful remarks about the weather, she put her hands to her forehead and pressed back her hair and knitted her brown eyebrows, and said:

"For goodness' sake, John, leave the weather to work itself out, and do go on with your breakfast."

John bore these rebuffs with meekness and magnanimity, and, being a big, simple fellow, with a great love for his sister, tried to hit the happy mean between silence and garrulity and failed utterly, for Madge's irritability found an extraordinary variety of excuses for snappiness.

"Look here, Madge," said John one morning, after the third week. "I am afraid you are not taking enough exercise, or else you are reading too many novels. I shall have to prescribe for you if you go on like this."

"What absolute nonsense you talk!" said Madge. "As if any member of a doctor's family would ever take his medicine or his advice! Besides which, I am perfectly well, thank you. Never better in my life."

"All right," said John. "I am glad to hear it. But you might, perhaps, tell me what you do in your bedroom late o' nights."

He looked with a very straight gaze at his sister, and she flushed and looked uneasy. But she answered with undeniable spirit:

"I mind my own business, and do not interfere with other people's affairs."

John looked hurt, though he gave a short laugh—so hurt that Madge went over to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"You silly old John," she said. "I suppose you will

worry and worry until I shall have to tell you. If you must know—I am writing a book.”

John dropped his pipe on to the carpet and broke a very nice amber mouthpiece.

“A book,” he said, in a kind of awed whisper. “Good God!”



## CHAPTER IX

MADGE LE DREUX, like other people who write novels, found that a plot is a worrying thing to invent, and that imaginary characters have a habit of jibing at their creator and playing all sorts of tricks which lead to awkward complications. The tangle of conflicting interests at the end of one chapter caused an immense expenditure of imaginative activity and hours of thoughtfulness and dreaminess and mental strugglings before a starting-point could be gained for the chapter which followed. Madge found her flat too small for these operations of intellect. The walls seemed to close round her brain and narrow her ideas. It became a habit with her to do her thinking in the park.

The spring had come to Lavender Park as to other places of the earth, and bright sunshine sparkled on the window-panes of "Intellectual Avenue," and gilded the chimney-pots on the flat roofs, and put a rosy glamour upon the red bricks of these great blocks of mansions. The privet hedges inside the railings were bursting into bud, and round the flower-beds, in the centre of the yard-square lawns of the ground-floor flats, crocuses thrust their golden heads through the moist earth, and up above, on the balconies, the window-boxes, watered and watched by the ladies who came out in their dressing-gowns while their babies were setting forth to the park, were now filled with feathery ferns, and with the bright colour of the first spring flowers.

Over the wooden fence, on the opposite side of the road, the park was a paradise, and many Adams, who had left their Eves at home, walked about the winding paths with rakes and brooms, and an air of conscious pride in the awakening of the sleeping beauty as though they and not God had given the kiss of life to the spring maiden. Certainly the gardener as well as God deserved some share of the praise and glory. With bent backs they had planted the little bulbs which now were sprouting up in all the beds, and weaving golden

embroideries on the green carpet of the grass. It was as though thousands of Cinderellas had come dancing here at night, and had left their golden slippers behind when daylight came.

Although under the rule of the London County Council, and ticketed with its labels of "Keep off the grass," and "Do not pluck the flowers," this park in South-west London had something fairylike and enchanting in its beauty, when, during the first days of spring, every twig upon the trees and bushes was beaded with the tiniest of pale-green leaves, through which the sunlight slanted. Up above, snow-white sheep were roving across the blue pastures of the sky, chased by the invisible hounds of heaven, and below in the lake where, on Saturday afternoons, hooligan boys made windmills of their oars, and went for great adventures round uninhabited islands, little waves, all sparkling with gems, came crisply to the shores. The fresh wind was laden with that faint fragrance which comes from moist earth and dew-laden grass, and the winecups of white and golden flowers.

Madge le Dreux, wandering in search of a plot, or sitting on the green bench outside the owl-house, where five old birds ruffled their feathers and blinked at the sunshine, awakened from strange day-dreams with a start to find that her thoughts had been straying far from the story of old-fashioned people in a country town, and that this odour of spring had stirred her senses with a subtle intoxication. Often she forgot her literary ambitions, and in the park life called to her and throbbed in her veins. The spring got into her blood, and sparkled in her eyes, and she was filled with those dancing desires which come to girlhood in the youth of the year.

She discovered that she had unconsciously adopted a habit which belonged to other literary people in the street of mansions. They, too, came into the park to think out their little plots, and to ponder over ideas for new plays, and to steal new themes of musical composition from the chorus of the birds, and the melodies of Nature, with which these gardens were filled when the wind was blowing through the trees, and the little waves were lapping across the lake, and the waterfowl were making strange little noises on the island, and the pigeons were cooing in the dovecot near the fountain, and the children were laughing everywhere.

She passed men on the park seats, who sat tracing strange



patterns on the gravel pathways with their sticks, or making little notes in their notebooks, or just staring straight in front of them with unseeing eyes, full of thoughtfulness. She recognised some of them as her neighbours, who had their biographies in "Who's Who." One was the distinguished Mr. Cressington, whom she met afterwards at the Fraquets and in other flats, where he stood with his back to the mantelshelf, or sitting deep in a chair with big, fidgety hands on his knees, talking strange whimsical philosophy bubbling with the laughter of life, freakish in its humour, yet revealing underneath deep currents of serious thought, of historical knowledge, and of reverence for the old-fashioned virtues of truth and generosity and simplicity of faith. He came often into the park, a quaint figure, with a brown felt hat, and a long coat with the cape turned back over one shoulder, and a heavy stick, with which he prodded the ground. Sometimes he would stand in utter absent-mindedness in front of a flower-bed or staring at the ducks splashing and quacking at the edge of the lake, and often he would laugh to himself, a rich, chuckling laugh, as though the comicality of his thoughts amused him. And sometimes he would take off his broad hat and let the breeze blow through the fair tousled curls on his big, boyish head, and stand looking round at the park in an attitude of simplicity and joy, unconscious of any people who might be looking at him. Madge used to read his articles in a weekly paper in which Cressington had conversations with himself and the world, and many times he referred in a word or two to the beauty of Lavender Park, and to the intellectual society of the street of mansions, which seemed of continual and exciting interest to him.

There was another absent-minded man who came into the park. He was a tall, lean man, with a keen, ascetic face, and blue-grey eyes, obviously poor, if he might be judged by his loose, baggy clothes, and flannel shirt. He wrote verses which appeared in obscure corners of evening papers and songs sung by amateurs in suburban drawing-rooms. Madge was always amused by him because he carried an indiarubber ball in his pocket, and while he walked up and down the winding paths, played a game of bounce with it, and ran after it if it escaped his hand, like a small boy on his way to school. Other men came with small boys less childish than this newspaper poet, and miniatures of themselves. Hand in hand they strolled about, and young



fathers who were journalists and writers of one kind and another answered with infinite patience and evident pride in the intelligence of their offspring the interminable questions of one-in-the-family children who desired to know how things came, and how things worked, and all those simple and stupendous problems by which children baffle the wisdom of their parents. Some of these young fathers and small sons seemed to be good comrades, and Madge le Dreux liked to see them strolling into the park together in the spring sunshine.

Then there was Bertram Ordish. To him Lavender Park seemed a happy hunting-ground, in which he found many opportunities of adventure. Madge saw him on many mornings racing round the cycle track for half an hour as if he were chased by a foul fiend or pursuing the witch women riding on the wind. With the two tails of his Norfolk jacket waist-band dangling behind, without his hat, and with his head held high, he went round and round the park on swift wheels, and never once noticed Madge, who, with her writing-tablet on her lap meditated on the roadside seat, or Patsy, the artist girl, who, in a blue overall and a limp straw hat, sat—with permission of the park-keepers—on a plot of grass from which all others were barred, by a penalty not exceeding five pounds, painting a green picture of "My Lady Spring," to be rejected by the Royal Academy in May.

Sometimes Ordish was the leader of a small squadron of cyclists, the boys and girls from flat land, with whom he entered into races between one tree and another, and to whom he told entertaining stories over his shoulder while he free-wheeled along the smooth track. They seemed to be funny stories, though his face was quite serious, so funny, that shouts of laughter followed the scampering wheels, and one small boy deliberately dropped off his bicycle and lay laughing on the grass border of the track.

Bertram Ordish's great ideas in life seemed to be vigorous exercise and fresh air. On the mornings when he left his bicycle at home, he would stroll down to the boathouse and go rowing for an hour or two. The boatmen knew him, and always touched their hats and grinned, as though pleased to see him. He seemed to have a peculiar affection for one particular boat, called "Oakapple"—they were all named after flowers or fruits—and would pretend to be seriously annoyed if he had to be fudged off with a boat called "Cherry



Blossom " or " Buttercup." Madge learnt these habits of his later.

He called out to her one morning as she was passing to her usual seat by the owl-house. His voice, loud and cheery, startled her, for she had not noticed the boat moored to the bank and the long figure stretched out in it, with his head on the seat, the rudder lines on each side of him, and his arms, with flapping shirt-sleeves, folded across his chest.

" Good-morning," he called out. " Come for a row. Why not ? "

Madge looked down and laughed. " I see no reason why not. But why should I ? You look very happy there, and the wind is rather fresh."

" Can you row ? " he said. " If not, I'll teach you. It's the finest exercise in the world for ladies who live in stuffy flats."

" Oh, I can row," said Madge. " I am a country-bred girl."

" Good," said Bertram Ordish. " We will have a race. You shall have another boat, and I'll give you three lengths start and beat you once round the island. Step in, and I will take you to the boathouse. Glorious adventure on a March morning ! "

Madge clasped her skirts and stepped into the boat. Certainly, on a March morning, with the sun shining on the lake, and the birds singing anthems on the island, it seemed good fun. She forgot the plot of an incompleated story.

" We have the world of waters to ourselves," said Ordish, " and a grand choice of leaky boats. Which will you have ? The ' Hyacinth ' or the ' Rose.' Oh, the ' Rose,' of course. That is your own flower."

It seemed that, according to his philosophy, every human being corresponded to a flower or vegetable. Some women were like the wild flowers in a Surrey hedge-row, others like the waxy things in hothouses, beautiful, but sickly. He knew some men with the physiognomy of turnips, and others exactly like mangel-wurzels. One of his most intimate enemies must have been a stinging-nettle in a previous existence. He was a prickly creature with poisoned stings, and all children hated him. He, Bertram Ordish, always had to cultivate the moral qualities of the dock-leaf whenever he was in the company of this fellow. However, Madge must have the " Rose."



She did ; and park-keepers, and city men on their way to offices, and nursemaids out early with their babies, watched an exciting race, as the two pairs of sculls whipped the water, and two boats with iron rowlocks chased each other round the island. Bertram Ordish won easily. Several times he had rested on his oars to let Madge overtake him, but at the finish, when he was three lengths ahead, he was pleased to compliment her.

" You know a thing or two about rowing," he said ; " but, if an old Blue may venture to advise, let your legs do more work than your arms, and get more of a swing on to your body. Puffed, aren't you ? Well, let's paddle underneath those willows and rest with the breeze on our brows."

Having moored the two boats to the stump of a tree, Bertram Ordish lay at full length again, and did not trouble to talk to the lady. He just said, " Pretty good, isn't it ? " and then stared up at the overhanging boughs and watched the sun glinting on the green buds.

Madge invited him to talk, but he said words were foolish things, and he would rather smoke a pipe, with her permission. However, after a few puffs, he volunteered to tell her a story. It was called " The King who Couldn't Laugh," and was like one of Hans Andersen's fairy-tales, but he had made it up himself for the amusement of a small boy with the mumps, and he thought of turning it into a play, if he weren't so confoundedly lazy. That reminded him—he had an appointment at twelve o'clock ; a committee meeting of the Children's Fresh-Air Fund. Madge had better walk with him as far as Victoria, it would do her good.

Madge made one or two excuses, but he ignored them, and, in his masterful way, having rowed to the shore, set off at a swinging stride with Madge's arm tucked through his, as though he were her brother. She could hardly keep pace with him, and was out of breath, and rather angry with the man who made her walk in an opposite direction to her desires, and did not trouble to speak more than a few casual words now and then. At Victoria he said : " Well, I'm sure that's done you good. You have got some colour in your cheeks. So long ! " and then, lifting his hat, strode across the road through the swirling traffic, leaving her on the kerbstone, laughing with a little annoyance at this abrupt abandonment.

But it was not the last walk she took with Bertram



Ordish. She met him many times in the street of mansions or in the park, and she seldom had the moral strength to refuse his invitation to go with him as far as Victoria, which seemed to be his starting-point for unknown regions where work was waiting for him. He explained to her that he did a lot of social work in addition to novel-writing, and that it kept him in touch with the facts of life, and one day he told her in the frankest way, that he had an income of his own, so that writing was only a hobby, and did not pay his washing bills. He was always candid like this, saying blunt, straightforward things, which were sometimes embarrassing to the girl at his side.

"Why don't you marry?" he said one day; and when she answered only with a laugh, he looked at her, and said, "You are quite old enough, and flat life with novel-reading and girls' day-dreams is a humbugging sort of thing. Get a husband, and have some jolly, fat babies, won't you?"

Madge laughed again, blushing vividly. From any other man but Bertram Ordish, such words would have been an outrage.

"'Nobody asks me, sir, she said,'" was Madge's answer.

Ordish looked down at her again seriously, out of his grey eyes.

"That's curious," he said. "Well, I will ask you. Marry me, won't you? We could have the jolliest time imaginable."

He made the offer as though he were asking her to go to the theatre, or to a picnic.

Madge did not allow herself to be embarrassed. "What ridiculous things you say," she said lightly, and turned her head away to look in a passing shop window to hide the crimson which stole into her cheeks.

"Do I?" said Ordish. "Yes, I suppose I am a ridiculous fellow. Well, I must jump on to that omnibus. *À revoir, Signorina.*"

He did not repeat his offer of marriage, though, thinking over it by her fireside, Madge believed him to have been quite serious; but, after that conversation, he went out of his way to meet her, and dropped into her flat sometimes of an evening, and with his long legs stretched out, and a pipe in his mouth, seemed to find a pleasure in being silent in her company, or in putting straight questions to her which she resented, but felt compelled to answer.



One of the questions was what she did with her time, and something prompted her to tell him of her literary ambitions, and of the book which she was writing.

"It's my secret," she said, repenting quickly of her confession. "Do not tell anyone."

"Oh, you may trust me," he said, and then drew out of her what her ideas were for a plot, and how difficult it was to get things right.

He was very kind and simple, and did not discourage her. Indeed, with a hint here and there, he helped her to unravel certain tangles, and to clear her ideas. He promised to do anything in his power to get it read by publishers and find a place for it, if she had really made up her mind to go on with it. But then, as he was going, he took her hand and stroked it with his big palm.

"So you have become a writing lady?" he said. "I am sorry for that."

"Why?" said Madge. "Why should you be sorry, please?" After his kindness these words seemed cruel. "Do you think I am not clever enough?"

"Oh, it's easy to be clever," said Ordish. "We are all clever in this street of flats. But I thought you were one of the simple women, who would prove that life is sufficient in itself without the artificial stimulants of literary vanity and false hopes, and intellectual strivings."

"Literary vanity!" said Madge, drawing her eyebrows close together. "You are not very polite, I think."

"It's the simple truth, dear child," said Ordish. "I know too many literary ladies, and I hate them like the devil."

"I shall be sorry if you hate me," said Madge. She laughed, but there was a suspicion of annoyance in her voice.

Ordish was quite candid again. "I think I shall dislike you extremely when your first book is published," he said.

"Then a favourable review will seem to you of more importance than my plain-spoken friendship. So we shall quarrel, and I detest quarrelling with women." But, till then, however, permit me to love you."

He seemed to be jesting, and Madge could only laugh at him. But, as he was going, he turned and looked at her squarely.

"I would like to save you from a literary career. It blights all the virtue in a woman, Miss Madge."



It was the first time he had called her that, and he did it in a brotherly way.

"I have taken a week-end cottage in the country," he said, as though that had something to do with the subject of conversation. Madge did not perceive the drift of his words until he quoted a few lines of verse.

"Come live with me and be my love  
And we will all the pleasures prove."

"Anyhow, you must come down with your brother and spend a week-end with me," he said. "We will go picking flowers in the woods, and I would like to see you play Phyllis by my fireside." Then he picked up his felt hat, put it at the back of his head, unbuttoned the waistband of his Norfolk jacket, and, with a friendly smile, said, "Be good, sweet child, and let who will be clever."

When Madge told Ordish of her literary ambitions and said, "It is my secret. Do not tell anyone," she did not let him know that she had already shared that secret with a mutual friend.

This was Raymond Fraquet, who had been less discouraging. He, also, had been surprised, but had expressed his astonishment in a delightful way, which had brought quick blushes to Madge's cheeks, and filled her with new hope.

"I should never have guessed it," he said. "I always looked upon you as a country mouse who had come to town with innocent, wondering eyes at all our Cockney ways. But it is not the first time professional writers have been taken by surprise like this. Old Dr. Johnson and his circle would hardly believe their ears when they discovered Fanny Burney's secret, and the authorship of 'Evelina.' They had never suspected that little Fanny's brown eyes had been so vigilant while she sat silent in the corner. And then, look at the Brontës—the three wonderful sisters who startled the world from a country vicarage! Oh, I expect great things of you! You will be one more 'Currer Bell.'"

He had said those words in the drawing-room of the doctor's flat, to which he often came now for afternoon tea. Then he had insisted upon seeing Madge's manuscript, and she had brought it down—a great packet of closely-written



pages—and, for an hour or more, he had sat reading the slips and letting each one fall upon the carpet as he read, while Madge sat by with a burning face resting on the palm of her hand, watching the smiles flicker about his lips, or the raising of his eyebrows in momentary surprise, and listening to an occasional exclamation of praise, and feeling her heart throb with a strange excitement.

His verdict on the first part of her story was very favourable, tempered by the kindest criticism. He pronounced it to be "strong stuff," and said the character drawing of the social life in a Yorkshire town seemed to be drawn direct from life. But the story was loosely constructed, and the plot moved too slowly, he thought, and she must get some passion into it. There was a fine situation to be made out of the squire's love for the curate's wife. She must not be afraid of it. She must go for it without being nervous of shocking the sensibilities of conventional folk."

"But I'm rather afraid of that," said Madge. "My brother, for instance, will open his eyes in wonderment and rebuke me with a cold look of disapproval. He is a Puritan, by instinct."

"Oh, I loathe Puritanism," said Fraquet. "It is too deadly an enemy to art. It has made us a nation of Philistines. Art has nothing whatever to do with the morality of the dissenting chapel and the street preacher. The one aim of literature is to tell the truth, whatever it may be, ugly or beautiful. It must analyse emotion, and go deep to the hidden well-springs of passion. It must strip men and women of all their coverings and show the naked, quivering heart. Puritanism hides things up. It puts decent clothing over the nakedness of humanity. It smothers vice and ugliness and human frailty under a mountain of hypocrisy, and pretends that smug respectability is the goodliest thing in the eyes of God. What detestable humbug!"

He admitted, however, that the English people do not want the truth. They are afraid of it, and it always shocks them. They love sentiment, but they hate the deeper emotions. They start away from any touch of real passion as though afraid of being scorched by fire. Raymond Fraquet, himself, had learnt that by bitter and painful experience. He was an absolute failure because he had refused to be false to art. Sometimes he was so sick of writing for a stupid public that he had a mind to throw away his pen and turn



to market-gardening to provide the public with potatoes and tomatoes and things they understand.

Madge was often disconcerted by Raymond Fraquet's bitter reflections upon his own lack of success. This consciousness of failure was almost an obsession with him, and he returned to the thought of it again and again in his conversations with her. It seemed to hurt him to the soul, and his nerves quivered at the cruelty and callousness of the public whose favour he had tried to gain. Yet Madge dimly realised that there was a certain insincerity in these acknowledgments of failure, because often, with strange inconsistency, he would claim to have a following of all the people who "counted." He was happy to think, he said, that he had written at least two plays which would endure after his death. And it was a source of pride to him that so many brilliant men and women were eager to welcome any new work of his.

"I owe much to women," he said. "They understand me more than men, and are quick to give me their sympathy—even their hero-worship—which, perhaps, is a dangerous stimulant to a man's natural vanity."

He smiled when he said this, as though his sense of humour was keen enough to resist the flattery of women. But his smile seemed to ask also for a little of the hero-worship from Madge le Dreux, and she gave it to him readily, with eager little words of sympathy and encouragement and admiration. For the truth was that, though she saw a certain trace of weakness in Raymond Fraquet—so different as he was from her strong silent brother—she had a girl's reverence for his brilliant intellect and his high ideals of art, and his achievements. She also was flattered, and marvelled, with a warm glow of pride, that Raymond Fraquet, the dramatist and essayist, should give her his friendship, and reveal himself to her.

He had a strange fascination, which she could not quite understand, not being blind to his vanity and to his self-absorption, and to that strain of morbidity which gave him a haunting air of melancholy when he was not excited by swift moods of gaiety when he played with ideas. She fancied, too, that in spite of his apparent cynicism and his real bitterness, he was a sentimentalist. There were times when, as they were alone together, his voice became strangely tender, with a little thrill in it, which made her



pulse flutter, and, once or twice, when he thanked her for her sympathy and understanding, his eyes, meeting hers, had a lingering gaze, before which she drooped her lashes or turned her head aside, with a sharp throb at the heart, which made her a little afraid of herself and him.

He was so different to Bertram Ordish, with his blunt, bluff ways and stimulating character. Yet she yearned for further conversation with him, and if two days passed without his knock at the door, or a meeting somewhere, it seemed as if some desire in her were unsatisfied, and that the days had been dull.

As it happened, many days did not pass without a meeting with Raymond Fraquet. He was very courteous and attentive in his friendship, and to the brother and sister from the country he sent many tickets, giving them an introduction to the intellectual centres of London life—tickets to the theatres, to picture-galleries, to afternoon concerts, to lectures (on drama, and Socialism, and literary centenaries), and to dinners celebrating the life or death of men of genius or in honour of the great men and women who are still shining lights to a dull world.

Fraquet himself was the hero of one of these intellectual gatherings, being the chief guest at an *Afternoon Tea* by the Literary Ladies' Club. In this case the invitation to Madge le Dreux did not come from the dramatist and essayist, but from Winifred Vernon, author of "Sweetheart and I," and other well-known serials, who was a member of the Club.

"My dear," she said, popping into Madge's flat, "if you want to see Raymond Fraquet in all his glory, and with a halo round his head, call for me this afternoon at No. 150, Arundel Street, Strand. There will be free tea, and fancy cakes."

Madge could not resist the temptation of this offer, and that afternoon took a brown bus to Victoria (in which a drunken workman slept with his head on her shoulder) and a District train to the Temple Station (in which three barristers' clerks and two journalists studied her hair, her eyes, and her dress, with an embarrassing observation as they sat opposite), and, after inquiring of a commissionaire at the door of a tall building in Arundel Street, learnt, from a jerk of his thumb downwards, that the Literary Ladies' Club was in that block of buildings below stairs.

She went past a gilded lift and down a flight of stairs



with threadbare carpeting, and came into a long and narrow corridor. A parlour-maid, with flushed cheeks, carrying a loaded tea-tray, hurried along it to a distant door, and went into the room at the end of the passage. As the door opened Madge heard a strange, loud noise which startled her. It was a large number of women's voices, high-pitched, but not unmelodious, laughing and talking together, with extraordinary vivacity and excitement. The stream of sound rose and fell, and then was followed by a sudden silence, broken only by the murmurs of a man's voice. Madge seemed to recognise the low, melancholy voice of Raymond Fraquet, and as she looked along the corridor when the women's voices were raised again with shrill laughter—Raymond must have said a witty thing in his serious way!—she certainly recognised his brown felt hat hung up on a peg, and his silver-knobbed stick in the stand underneath. Madge touched a little bell, according to a notice addressed to visitors, and when the maid came, asked for Miss Winifred Vernon. Winifred happened to come out herself, and, with a little cry of pleasure, came forward and, taking her friend's hand, led her into the room.

"My dear," she whispered, "Raymond Fraquet is being worshipped with the sweet incense of flattery, and he likes it immensely."

Madge entered into a room so hot that it made her cheeks flame. It was a long, low room, furnished daintily and hung with pictures of sweet-faced women with ringlets and long, bare necks, whom Madge, when she had time to notice them, took to be the portraits of literary ladies of a past epoch. The literary ladies of the club were of a different type and fashion, though by no means of one type or one fashion. A few of the younger ones were elegantly dressed, with big hats, and long, slim gowns, looking remarkably like the fashion pictures in society papers. Madge learnt afterwards that in some cases these girls were the artists of those pictures or the writers of the articles describing them, or the procurers of the advertisements accompanying them.

Patsy, the artist girl of the flat in Lavender Park, was among them, looking very æsthetic in a Liberty green. But other women here were in plain workaday, short-skirted costumes, and they had the appearance of women who work for their living. Some of them had tired, pale faces, with lines about the eyes and lips, undisguised by pearl



powder or paint-pot. There were several elderly women among them, rather care-worn, and with shrill voices when they laughed. There were two or three old ladies, not altogether unlike the prints on the walls behind them; and there were a number of younger women—girls, some of them—who sat in a half-circle round the fireplace where Raymond Fraquet stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, the centre of interest, and, as some of these women writers would have said, "the cynosure of all eyes."

Other men were in the room, surrounded by little groups of women, and balancing tea-cups on their knees with the carelessness that comes from long training at tea-parties—at least six pale men, with longish hair and clean-shaven faces, with thoughtful eyes and sensitive lips. They belonged to a type, though differing in details of physiognomy, and Winifred Vernon explained them to Madge.

"They are all literary editors from Fleet Street offices," she said. "It is bribery and corruption to invite them here. We give them tea-cakes in order to get orders for articles and short stories. But the game does not work—it has been overdone, and most of them avoid the trap. Sit down and have some tea yourself, my dear. It will be a long time before we can work our way through the crowd to Raymond Fraquet."

Madge sat down in a vacant chair by the tea-table, was introduced to a red-headed girl with freckles, and then left with her new acquaintance by Winifred, who formed another group and set them all laughing by some comical remark.

Miss Bartlett was conversational. "Are you in the newspaper line?"

"No," said Madge.

"Lucky for you. It's a rotten game. I do the weddings for *The Tory*. 'The bride looked beautiful in real lace'—you know the sort of tosh."

She asked another question. "Do you go in for short stories? That's a poor game too. The market is overstocked."

"I haven't done anything yet. I am trying my hand at something," said Madge nervously, anxious to claim some shadow of literary distinction in this club of Literary Ladies.

"Oh, I see; you haven't found yourself yet," said the red-headed girl carelessly. "There are lots of us like that."

She looked round her sharply at a thin-faced woman in



black, who with an air of grim determination was making her way to the other end of the room.

"There she goes again. It's abominable!"

"Who? What?" said Madge.

"That woman is going to open the windows," said the red-headed girl. "She is a fresh-air fiend, to say nothing of her vegetarianism. Of course she doesn't care a hang how many of us die of influenza. I have reported her fifteen times to the committee already."

She gave a ripple of laughter.

"Not this time, my lady! Look, the secretary has seen her dodge. We are divided into two camps here—open windows and cold draughts, closed windows and comfort. The quarrel threatens to wreck the Club."

The red-headed girl finished her tea and slipped away to join a friend. Madge was left to listen to the conversation around her.

"I can't think how she manages to get such good reviews for her work. She can't even write decent grammar."

"It's frightfully heart-breaking. The story has been to fifteen publishers, and declined by all. It means bread and butter to me. I don't write for pin-money, like some other women I know."

Madge glanced round at the last speaker and saw a pretty woman with dark, mournful, mystical eyes, and hair loosely looped under a black hat.

She leant forward to her companion, a buxom woman of thirty-five with a square good-natured face.

"My dear, do try to think of something that will put a little money into my pocket. Could you not persuade your editor to give me a few articles to do? There must be an opening somewhere, and a word from you would go a long way. You see, I have my boy to think of. I don't want to take him away from school."

"I don't mind speaking to him," said the other woman; "but I am afraid it is no use. He is besieged with offers of that kind. There are too many women who can write, and too many who will write for next to nothing. The market has been spoilt. Women are all blacklegs. Well, my dear, I must be going. Keep your courage up."

"Oh, I have lost all my courage!" said the pretty woman with the dark eyes. "This writing is a hopeless business. Charing would be more profitable."



"And more useful, perhaps," said her friend, laughing, as she moved away.

Winifred Vernon came back to Madge. "I think we ought to rescue Raymond Fraquet," she said. "It is not good for a man to be too long in the glare of adoring eyes."

She led Madge through the throng of women to the end of the half-circle in which Fraquet still stood with his arm on the mantelpiece.

"How clever he is!" said a young girl, in a low voice.

"And so fascinating," said the girl next to her. "What a heavenly smile he has!"

"I like his eyes—so full of poetry."

"I wish I had a notebook to take down some of his conversation. He has such big ideas, and he expresses himself so beautifully."

Raymond Fraquet was expressing himself on the subject of chivalry. He was seriously inclined, he said, to institute a new order of chivalry, reviving the old code of honour of men to women. We lived in a brusque and brutal age, he said, and men had lost that faith in pure womanhood, which was the highest ideal of the Middle Ages. A gentleman nowadays was not expected to succour the weak, to be meek before women, and to use his strength in their defence. That was the fault of women to a great extent. They had claimed equality with men, instead of upholding their spiritual superiority and ruling the world, and men's hearts, by the illimitable power of love and beauty and womanly influence. It would be good to get back to the old ideals. Why should not men be enrolled in a new order of knightly service?"

"Oh, indeed, why not?" said a lady, who wore a continual look of ecstasy, as she regarded Raymond Fraquet with scorching eyes. "How splendid it would be for men to wear their ladies' scarves upon their sleeves, and to go forth to do battle against the powers of evil and ignorance uplifted by the inspiration of good women!"

Patsy, the artist girl, was enthusiastic with this chivalrous idea.

"How ripping!" she said, twisting and untwisting her hands in a nervous way. "I would love to design the costume of the new knights. I think they should have black silk breeches and stockings, and a cut-away coat with silver buttons, revealing a white doublet bearing a scarlet cross."

Fraquet smiled at this enthusiasm. "I think we should



have no outward sign of chivalry. We must not wear our hearts on our sleeves for daws to peck at. The new knights would be a secret society, and their vows would be taken without ceremony, in the secret chambers of their own hearts."

A clear, contralto voice came from the outer circle round the guest of the Literary Ladies.

"People who talk of the chivalry of the Middle Ages are utterly ignorant of history. They were ages of brutality and bestiality, when women were only chattels and household slaves. The men who resent the equality of women nowadays, and who talk nonsense about our spiritual superiority, and the illimitable influence of beauty and love, merely conceal their contempt for women under honeyed phrases. We do not ask for chivalry but equal rights."

There was a murmur of "Hear, hear," from some of the women, and indignant protests from some of those who had been stirred to emotion by Fraquet's idealism. Madge, looking round, saw that Fraquet's critic was the square-faced middle-aged woman who had been talking to the lady who had lost her courage, and found writing a hopeless business.

Winifred Vernon supported her, but whether seriously or with a sense of humour was not quite clear.

"I second Mrs. Weatherby," she said. "Votes for Women, Mr. Fraquet, sir, and no taxation without representation."

Fraquet had flushed a little at the challenge, but he took it smiling.

"Oh," he said, "I am for the absolute liberty of womanhood. Liberty of life and creed and love. That has been the gospel of my work, if I may say so. But I do not agree with this cry of Votes for Women. That will not give them liberty, but make them slaves of party passion, and put them under the heel of the world's brutality. However, do not let us end this delightful afternoon with hot words. It has been a great pleasure to me to be entertained by the Literary Ladies."

"He shirks the argument," said a girl next to Madge.

But those nearest to him were thanking him effusively for coming to tea with them, and the woman who had suggested that the gentlemen should wear their ladies' scarves upon their sleeves clasped both his hands, and said:



"We shall remember this afternoon, Mr. Fraquet. I for one, have been refreshed and strengthened by all your beautiful words."

Other ladies pressed forward to take his hand as Fraquet made his way from the room, and to each of them he said a laughing word or two, in his charming way.

Madge le Dreux had the opportunity of studying Raymond Fraquet in other places where literary women and literary men were gathered together, for there was no close confraternity of letters in London she found, and even for an unknown girl, living in a Lavender flat, who had not yet written her first novel, it was not difficult with a little help from the Fraquets and Bertram Ordish and Winifred Vernon and others to enter the social circles of the intellectuals. Tickets, as we have seen, were plentiful, and passed on from one to another without the slightest regard to the name originally inscribed upon the invitation, and even private houses were open to any stranger who might arrive with a friend for a drawing-room meeting or an evening reception. These gatherings were of a semi-public character and, generally, arranged to ventilate certain ideas, to formulate certain schemes, or to advertise someone desiring publicity.

Thus Madge went across the river with the Fraquets to houses in Cadogan Square and other places of wealth to hear literary Members of Parliament discussing advanced theories of socialism in gilded drawing-rooms to men and women in evening-dress; and to salons where titled hostesses invited well-known people to listen to a new poet, or a new musician, and to watch the melody in movement of a new skirt-dancer. She went also with the Fraquets to houses across the water where those who had made a success of art and literature lived in splendour. She understood then the distinction which Winifred Vernon had drawn between the *Half-Greats*, and the *Really Great*, and between the *Just-fall-shorts*, and those who had actually "Arrived."

There was a world of difference. In Lavender Park the wives of literary men kept one or at most two servants, and worried over small economies. Across the water they had a butler and a footman above stairs in addition to the usual females below. In Lavender Park people went up to town by a brown bus and a District train, or with self-conscious extravagance, spent eighteen-pences on hansoms and taxicabs; on the other side of the river they gave a nod



to men disguised as Teddy Bears, and were whirled away in their own motor-cars and glorious luxury.

The social gatherings in the street of mansions had among their invited guests a stray M.P. or two, members of the L.C.C., the cousins of City Aldermen, the brother-in-law of a Canon of Westminster, the sister of the secretary of a Secretary of State. That was as near as they could get to the seats of the mighty. But on the other side, to the salons of the ladies who wrote novels of prodigious circulation, and of playwrights who wrote musical comedies which ran a year and a half in London, and another year with five provincial companies, there came the Secretaries of State themselves, bishops in aprons and gaiters and white whiskers, and peers who had artistic instincts, who read all the very latest novels, and who went five times to each new Gaiety piece, and generally disproved the popular idea of lack of intelligence in the hereditary chamber.

But in spite of almost dazzling prosperity, Madge learnt to her surprise that the houses of these people were not closed against poverty. The Fraquets, for instance, who were poor, were welcomed whenever they cared to cross the water, and other professional people who lived in little flats in inexpensive neighbourhoods had the privilege of putting on evening-dress and joining the assemblies of notabilities. Madge began to know many of these people, at least by name and fame, and she realised that the society of intellectuals was on both sides of the water curiously gregarious. The distinguished novelists or the distinguished playwrights or the well-known actors, who looked in at the evening reception of Mrs. Augustus Brown (who never sold less than ten thousand copies of one of her new books) looked in also at the Sunday afternoon at-homes of Muriel Winter (who played the lead at St. James' Theatre), and at the *matinée* benefit for the Actors' Orphan Fund, and at the Queen's Hall concert of Debussy and the new impressionists, and at the address by Byam Shand on the aristocracy of the masses.

It seemed to Madge, the looker-on, that these literary and professional people were like a big family of clever and rather quarrelsome children. Each one was immensely interested in each other's point of view. They nodded to each other in the friendliest possible way whenever they met, criticised each other's work in private, wrote letters to each other—sometimes amusingly violent letters—in the papers, reviewed



each other's books, accused each other of plagiarism, and now and again ran away with one another's wives.

What startled Madge most, and shocked her sense of reverence for the great names in contemporary literature, was the utter contempt of her friends in Lavender Park for the successful people on the other side of the river. Nothing, for instance, could exceed Raymond Faquet's scorn for Mrs. Augustus Brown.

"That little woman with the beady eyes," he said, upon leaving her house one afternoon, after having made himself particularly charming, "has made a huge fortune—compared to my miserable poverty—by pandering to the dull, portentous stupidity of the English people. She is utterly uninspired, and her novels are machine made."

At another time he said, "How is it that Perceval Warrington can buy motor-cars and send his boys to Westminster School while I have to think twice before I buy a new silk hat? I will tell you, dear lady: because he writes musical comedies for servant-girls and shop-girls. Oh, it is damnable, damnable! It makes one despair."

"But, after all," said Madge, "money is not the highest reward. Poets and geniuses have always been poor. You at least have the success of merit."

Raymond was walking with a quick nervous pace down Sloane Street, and he was silent for a moment or two after those words. Then he gave a bitter little laugh.

"Even poets do not like their poverty," he said; "and I see no reason why they should be starved while fools grow fat. Anyhow, it is a proof of the world's horrible injustice, and of its still more horrible ignorance."

When he said good-bye to Madge outside her flat, he looked into her eyes for a moment under the light of a lamp-post.

"You always cheer me up," he said. "You always understand."

He lifted her hand to his lips.

"What should we do without the women who understand?"

It was the first time that he had put her hand to his lips, and the light kiss seemed to scorch her hand and her whole being, so that when she went into her flat she had burning cheeks. She was a little afraid of Raymond Fraquet in these tender moods of his. She wondered what her brother



John would say if she told him, and what Mrs. Fraquet—Phillida—would think if she knew of these little incidents of tenderness. She was "Phillida" now to Madge, by her own desire. She had asked for Madge's friendship, and Madge had grown to love this woman—not much older than herself—who had such a beautiful graciousness of spirit.

But somehow, in the heart of Madge le Dreux, there was a sense of disquietude when she was in the company of Mrs. Fraquet. Raymond's wife knew that her husband saw Madge sometimes when she herself stayed at home, not caring to accept all these tickets of invitation which crowded the mantel-shelf and came by every morning's post. But Madge doubted whether she knew how often Raymond met her in the park and in the rendezvous of London. If she went to the Fraquets' flat in the evening he did not, perhaps, mention to his wife that he had seen Madge that afternoon. Without any compact of secrecy Madge understood that between Raymond Fraquet and herself there was a sense of secret understanding—that they withheld from Phillida the knowledge of a walk to Victoria, a stroll in the park, five minutes' conversation outside the letter-box at night, some whispered words at a concert, a tea together after a *matinée* performance. These meetings were not deliberately hidden, perhaps, but they were not mentioned before Phillida, whose eyes were always full of candour.

It was all perfectly innocent, of course, and Raymond Fraquet's friendship was a precious thing. Yet Madge le Dreux wondered sometimes whether this secret understanding with Phillida's husband were not a little dangerous. The thought made her uneasy, and made her avoid Phillida's candid eyes.

## CHAPTER X

WHILE Madge was searching life in such intellectual phases as were contained in the small flats facing Lavender Park, and in certain assemblies of highly cultured people beyond the river, John, her brother, was, in his silent, matter-of-fact way, storing up a lot of new knowledge, and worrying out one or two big problems.

The experiences of the brother and sister coincided at certain points. John, for instance, met the Fraquets in their flat. Indeed, it happened that he came to know Mrs. Fraquet better than Madge did. He also had the friendship of the three girls upstairs, who sometimes came downstairs. With Bertram Ordish he was on almost comradely terms, because that eccentric neighbour now made a habit of dropping into the doctor's study on at least one night of the week, and into his most comfortable arm-chair, where he would smoke a pipe, and discuss anatomy and botany and other subjects of natural science in which he took a romantic and almost childish interest. Childish, because he never ceased to wonder at the facts, and romantic because he clothed them with the fantastic imagination of a man to whom life was a thrilling fairy tale, abounding in miracles.

But here ended the common ground of Madge and John le Dreux in their quest of knowledge. Wild horses could not, and, as a matter of fact, did not, drag the brother to the theatres, concerts, lectures, and receptions, which made such serious interruptions in the progress of his sister's book. But he went to other places not explored by Madge upon her travels of adventure in London, and he met many interesting people to whom she had not been introduced.

He went, for instance, into many of the small flats along the street inhabited by men and women not on the visiting list of the Fraquets and their circle. They sent, hurriedly sometimes, for his professional assistance, but, in several cases, were not in such a hurry to pay his bills. He did not



bother much about that, having no financial instincts, and he thought himself repaid to some extent by the opportunities of increasing his knowledge, not only in a medical way, but, to use a long word, not in John's vocabulary, sociologically. For, curiously enough, though John was not at all interested in literature, he had an immense interest in life. He would rather cut off a leg—somebody else's leg, of course—than write a letter, far less a book; but he went about collecting facts about men and women as if he were a journalist in chase of "copy." He never published the results of his investigations, even in conversation, but pondered over them when he tramped on his rounds or went out at night, before turning into bed, on a swinging walk over one bridge round by the park palings and home again across another bridge.

There was a journalist in one of the flats who interested him because he revealed one phase of life previously unknown to the young doctor from the country. He was a man of about thirty-three or thirty-five, and he had a wife five years younger than himself and a baby of ten months. John was treating all three of them professionally—the baby for teething, the husband for nervous debility and want of blood (produced by nicotine poisoning), the wife for a disease not yet included in the pharmacopœia, but diagnosed by John as the incipient stage of a broken heart.

The husband called himself a "special correspondent," and John took in the halfpenny paper in which he "corresponded" for a salary of six pounds a week. It was really almost a breathless thing to follow his career, and John marvelled at the versatility and activity of this young man with grey hair and tired eyes, who had fainted one morning over his cigarette. On the evening of that fainting-fit he was in Sheffield, describing a prize fight, which had been broken up by the police after a wild scrimmage. Two days later he was in Paris, describing the first scene of a sensational murder trial, which lasted a fortnight. He came home for a week, and described a garden *fête*, a cat show, the opening of Parliament by the King, a baby-farm in Surrey, a fire in the East End, and the sunset off Blackfriars Bridge. During the following week he was on Dartmoor, chasing two escaped convicts, and on the Saturday night of that week he wrote a criticism of a new musical comedy at the "Gaiety"—owing to the indisposition of the chief critic. All this seemed a good deal for six pounds a week, and the restlessness of the life



and the uncertainty of the hours of work, had jangled the man's nerves, so that he could only keep them steady by smoking the cigarettes which turned his blood to water.

It was the hardest on the wife. John pitied that poor girl with the baby. She had one little maid who "slept out," and a charwoman—six pounds a week does not go far, even in a flat at Lavender Park—and she would stay up late to cook a meal and to wait for her husband to come home. Often he did not come home, and then the meal was spoilt, and the girl went weeping to bed. Then too many tears turned her temper, so that when the husband did come home, three hours after the telegram which said he would be back in half that time, she turned on him, and asked him why he had brought her to such a life, and how long she was going to be tortured. Of course, the young man with the grey hair had no answer to these questions, except that he had to earn his living and do his duty. Utterly inadequate reasons to the young wife who loved him so passionately that her anger was hysterical!

Then the baby died in convulsions, and John, who had tried to save it, waited for the husband to come home from a theatre, and to tell him the news. He left when the wife was weeping with her arms round the neck of the man whose face was whiter than hers. Not many weeks later the girl who was no longer a mother, sat by the bedside of her husband, and was happier in having him at home and nursing him. He had caught a chill when driving without an overcoat, on a motor-car, to the scene of a gas explosion. That meant pneumonia, but John hoped to pull him through.

There was another young couple in an adjoining block of mansions who interested Dr. John. They were very, very young, the husband having married when many young gentlemen are still wearing Eton collars, and the wife when other girls count the petals on summer flowers, and say, "This year, next year, now, never." They seemed to make a game of life, and their household was a nursery for two babes. The baby boy, aged twenty-one, was the Editor of *The Ladies' Magazine*, and his child-wife typed all day long—singing little songs between the paragraphs—from the manuscripts of novels and short stories written by school-chums of her husband now at Oxford. Between them they established an income of about seven pounds a week, out of which they kept a widow mother—the boy's mother—who never ceased



to repine at the early marriage of her son, and to pray God that he might escape the perils of that adventure.

"It's a rummy go altogether," said the Editor of *The Ladies' Magazine* to his doctor. "I had no notion how quickly the dibs fly when a fellow gets married. But it's good sport, and, thank goodness, I've more ideas than I can do with just at present, so that when the baker becomes really pressing in his attentions, or the butcher refuses to send round a steak until his little account is settled, it's the easiest thing in the world to slash off an article, or spin a yarn for a golden guinea. As for Bluebell—my wife, you know—she's just wonderful, and a perfect genius at economy. Of course, I get a bit tired of the same old tin of sardines for breakfast five days running, and the same old toasted cheese for supper; but, after all, it's a great idea to make a game of things, and to cultivate a sense of humour. I never laughed so much in my life until I got married. As for Bluebell—my wife, you know—she spends her days in laughing at the comicality of the whole business."

They laughed most of all when the baby was born—though, for a few hours before that event, the Editor of *The Ladies' Magazine* was as white-faced as the paper on which he was pretending to write an article—and the pink infant seemed to them a huge joke. After a few months it used to lie in its cradle while the young mother typed and typed and sang her little songs between the paragraphs, and kissed her baby between each chapter. John, who paid a professional visit at intervals, liked to hear the tick-tack of the typewriter and the delightful laughter of the girl who danced to the cradle to exhibit the beauty of her baby when John called round in the morning.

"You have a laughing heart," he said to the mother one day, and she said, "It's all so funny. Don't you think so?"

He had other patients in the street of mansions—literary ladies suffering from continual headaches, artistic ladies suffering from smokers' hearts, men of letters who were the victims of chronic dyspepsia, melancholia, insomnia, and other maladies due to sedentary habits, brain fatigue, and disappointed hopes. He also found one chronic disease in nearly all the flats; an incurable disease, it seemed—by name, Poverty. Not a single person in "Intellectual Avenue" had enough to live on comfortably. No matter how much



these people earned, and some of them earned quite a lot—it was desperately necessary to them to get more. They had to worry their overwrought brains, to work feverishly, at whatever their work might be, to spur on their mental activity with sharp goads, in order to increase an income which was always below, or barely level with, their expenditure on the strict necessities of life. Of course, their necessities varied with their position and avocation. Thus, a charming actress in one of the flats, who had a salary of twenty pounds a week at the Haymarket, and no one to provide for except herself, confessed that she was continually in debt because her dresses were so costly, and motor-cars ran into such a lot of money.

“Is it quite necessary to spend twenty pounds on one gown?” said Dr. John, with whom she discussed the subject with delightful candour. “I should have thought five pounds would have bought a pretty decent frock.”

Evidently he had said something rather funny, for she laughed at him in silvery cascades of laughter.

“My dear good man,” she said, “how profoundly ignorant you are of modern drama! If I were to go to the Haymarket in a five-guinea frock the manager would swoon, and, upon his recovery, give me the immediate sack.”

Different explanations were given by other victims of the incurable ill. A playwright spent more on luncheons and dinners than he earned in fees. A fashion-artist had to dress according to her own designs and disguise herself as a duchess when she went to the dirty office off Fleet Street, or to a Royal garden-party. Her editor was even more particular than Royalty, although his own clothes looked as if he slept in them at least three nights in a week. Whatever the causes might be, the effect was the same, and John found it a deplorable sign of the times, especially as, in the philosophy of modern economics, the doctor was always the last man paid. He wondered whether the game were worth the candle in “Intellectual Mansions.”

Behind the street of mansions facing the park, there was another great block of flats looking on to a long row of small, red-brick houses, which turned their backs upon the slum highway of the Park Road. John had his dispensary in the Park Road, and he therefore belonged to two worlds, inhabited on the one side by the intellectuals, and on the other by small shopkeepers—the aristocracy of the slum—and by factory hands, plumbers, packers, cabinet-makers,



bootmakers, builders' labourers, painters and decorators—who never aspired to the Royal Academy—out-of-works, who lived on their wives' wages, and men without visible means of subsistence, but "subsisting" nevertheless, fairly comfortably, on invisible means.

The block of flats between the two highways was a kind of half-way world, a *via media* of social life. In John's street of mansions, people earned from six to twenty pounds a week, and struggled to be smart and semi-fashionable and always cultured on the wages which were never enough for their wants.

In the flats behind, the inhabitants lived on incomes of two pounds, three pounds, and three pounds ten a week, and their great struggle was not to be fashionable, but to be respectable. It was a hard struggle with many of them. Actresses in provincial companies who "rested" compulsorily between one engagement and another, found it very difficult to eke out their earnings over the lean months of the year, and went terribly "on tick" with neighbouring tradesmen, who were often violent at the front doors, or refused to send goods up the back door lifts until the money had come down first. Here, also, lived junior sub-editors, who worked by night and slept by day, clerks in city offices with wives who were their drudges, and kept no maids, commercial travellers—some of whom made it an almost religious habit to get drunk on Sunday—several old soldiers on half-pay, who hung their medals over the mantelpiece and discussed the gay days at "Gib." over whisky and water, bookmakers who were not so fabulously rich as tradition suggests, but who, taking the year as a whole, made a steady living out of working-men's bets, widow ladies on slender means, and old maids pensioned by rich relations, or living on the interest of small sums invested carefully in building societies, big stores, Argentine stocks, and American railroads, which kept them in a continual state of agitation as to the condition of the money-market, international politics, and home affairs.

John was much interested in these old ladies, some of whom sent for him to give professional advice on the little ailments which touched them with the first fears of death. They lived strange, solitary lives inside their small flats, haunted by the dread of greater poverty, exercising severe little economies, stinting themselves of all but the bare necessities of life, and clinging with a kind of romantic courage



to their ideals of a genteel and respectable old age. They had charwomen from the Park Road—the women who supported out-of-work husbands—to do their “rough work”—it was not very rough, for they were scrupulously neat and tidy—but did their own dusting, and made their own beds, and cooked their breakfasts and suppers on little gas-stoves.

They had few friends, it seemed. The curate, sent by his vicar from the High Church at one end of the road, and the doctor—our friend John—were their most frequent visitors. Only rarely did one of the relations who made them a yearly allowance, or a friend of the days when they had been better off, call upon them. They did not make new acquaintances lightly. Two old ladies, for instance, living in flats divided by a fourth-floor passage, passed each other on the stairs for several years without saying “Good-morning.” Many of them, when the hall-door latch had clicked upon them, were almost as lonely and desolate in their flats as if they had been buried alive or sentenced to solitary confinement.

Their chief intercourse with life was through their respective charwomen, who “cleaned up” many of the flats, even in “Intellectual Mansions,” and knew a great deal about the private habits of their temporary masters and mistresses, the domestic strife with maidservants, the quarrels between husbands and wives, the new babies born or about to be born, and other details of human interest which they reported in garrulous gossip to any lady, old or young, who would pay them eighteen-pence a day, and listen while they worked. This cheered up the old ladies and made them feel less lonely. It was good news to them to know that the servant difficulty was still unsettled, that husbands and wives were still quarrelling, and that babies were still being born, though not so often as in the good old days.

John knew one of these old ladies very well. She suffered from bronchitis, and he attended her regularly. She was a frail little lady, with white hair and a face so delicate and charming now in old age that she must have been beautiful in her young womanhood. She was very poor; so poor that she could not afford a charwoman more than two days a week for an hour or two at a time. But she kept her rooms clean and fragrant, and the brass door-knocker was always brightly polished for his rat-tat, and, when he went in, there was little Miss Richards sitting in her dining-room, prim and tidy, with a book on her lap and some delicate lace-work in her hands.



She eked out her little income by making the finest point lace, and a philanthropic society for the aid of poor gentlewomen paid her as much as a shilling a yard for it, which took a week to do.

She was quite cheerful in her loneliness, and played and sang little songs to a tinkling piano with no audience but a canary which piped to her tunes; and her one great extravagance in life was her subscription to a chemist's library from which she obtained two new novels a week. She never read anything but novels, and liked them, she told John, "with plenty of love interest." To indulge in this extravagance she stinted herself of all other luxuries, and John suspected that she even went without sufficient nourishment of the body in order to feed her active brain and warm heart. This suspicion was confirmed in a way which shocked him more than many experiences in his career as a medical man. At nine o'clock one morning a frowsy woman rang his bell violently, thrust past the little maid, and demanded in a shrill and agitated voice to see the doctor. John, who came out into the hall from his breakfast, recognised her as the char-woman who "did" for Miss Richards.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Is Miss Richards ill?"

"Lord Almighty!" said the woman, "the poor old thing is layin' as stiff as a poker by the coal-scuttle. And as cold as a toad she was when I touched her. It's made me feel that queer, you can't think! I never could abide a corpse."

Miss Richards had died suddenly, and at the coroner's inquest it was proved that death had been caused by slow starvation. The only food found in the house were some crumbs in the canary's cage. But by a strange coincidence the canary was also dead, and its small cold body lay huddled upon the floor of its cage. John wondered whether in some way the bird had known of its mistress's death, and with a few last piping notes had mourned the loving old lady before giving up its own little ghost in grief. But what he wondered at still more was the reason why an old lady should be allowed to die of starvation within a stone's throw of "Intellectual Mansions."

He told the story that night to Phillida Fraquet, into whose flat he went with Madge. It brought a sudden mist to her eyes, and she put her hand on John's arm.

"Tell me," she said; "cannot I be of some use in future?"



I have very little to do in the world. If I could help some of these lonely old women it would make me less ashamed of my own life, not so utterly purposeless as I am."

John was thoughtful for longer than most men take to answer a question.

"Why," he said, "it would be good for them to know you, but I expect you would weary of the old people's gossip."

"I weary of my own thoughts," said Mrs. Fraquet. "Take me round to one or two of them."

That was a simple matter, and a few days later, John, feeling rather abashed, like a young yokel, as he strode by the side of a woman who had a natural elegance which did not depend on milliners or modistes, introduced Mrs. Fraquet to a little old lady—she might have been the twin sister of poor Miss Richards—with silver hair and a golden heart (they were her only wealth) who lived on the top floor of the back blocks in extreme poverty and pitiful loneliness, but warmed and kept alive by religious fervour (wet or fine, in frost or snow, she went to early service in the Anglican church at the end of the street) and by her pride in being still a "gentlewoman." Before five minutes had passed Miss Ringwood was warm friends with Mrs. Fraquet, and John, who left them soon to pay other visits, heard their laughter in a merry duet as he closed the front door of the tiny flat, the high tinkling laughter of this old lady and the low mirthful melody of Phillida Fraquet's voice. That introduction had been a success.

Mrs. Fraquet demanded other introductions, and before many days had passed she knew at least a dozen of John's old ladies in the back blocks, and gave a lot of her time to them. She took them out for walks in the park, and invited them to her own flat to tea, and made them known to one another.

It seemed to make a great difference to their lives.

John, who was called in for their little ailments of bronchitis or rheumatism, found them with a new brightness of spirits, and they talked continually of the charming young lady whose friendship had brought such a sparkling sunshine into their grey world.

"You are a great favourite with my old ladies," said John to Mrs. Fraquet one day, as they met in the street of mansions. "You have quite taken the place of the weather as a subject of conversation! They think you are the most



beautiful, the most charming, the most gracious woman in the world."

Mrs. Fraquet laughed, and a charming colour swept into her face.

"Why," she said, "to me they talk of nothing but Dr. John. He is the handsomest, the cleverest, the gentlest young doctor they have known during the past fifty years."

"In that case we have a right to feel pleased with ourselves," said John.

Phillida Fraquet flashed a look at his grave face and twinkling eyes.

"Are you pleased with me?" she said, and there was a kind of wistfulness in her voice.

"I?" Dr. John puzzled over the question.

"I am doing my best to make myself useful. I should like to think I was doing some little grain of good. You go about doing good day and night."

"I go about trying to earn my living," said John. "I don't pretend to be a philanthropist."

"You could not pretend anything," said Mrs. Fraquet. "You are always simple, and honest, and true."

John prodded the pavement with the ferrule of his umbrella, and stared down at the ground.

"I just plod along," he said. "I am a stupid, slow-witted fellow. Well, I must be moving off."

He lifted his hat and went down the street, and Mrs. Fraquet stood for a moment watching his tall figure disappear into the purple dusk of an evening in May. Then she turned as her husband's voice said:

"I say, Phillida, there is one of your tabby cats in the drawing-room. What an infernal nuisance it is that they come smelling round the place like this. What's the idea?"

He had come out of the hall entrance and stood with his hands in his jacket pockets looking at his wife fretfully.

"Tabby cats? What *do* you mean, Raymond?"

"One of your old women. I can't come into the flat nowadays without finding half a dozen Early Victorian ladies laughing like elderly hyenas. Why does that doctor-fellow palm them off on to you?"

"Do you mean Dr. le Dreux?" said Phillida. "Surely they don't interfere with you, do they?"

"Yes," said Fraquet. "I can't write when old women's cackling is in my ears all the time."

"Can't you?" said Mrs. Fraquet. "I am sorry. You should learn to control your nerves a little."

Fraquet's pale face flushed, and he looked as though he were going to say some angry words. But he met his wife's eyes, and checked himself.

"I think you might have some regard for my work, Phillida."

"Oh, your work!" said Phillida, with a swift scorn. "I have sacrificed my life to your work! I am going to think of other people's lives a little, and of my own."

Fraquet stared at her with a pained, puzzled look.

"God knows I only work for you, Phillida," he said. "What has made you so hysterical lately? I can't say a word without your jumping down my throat."

"Don't let us talk nonsense, Raymond," said Phillida. She walked past him into the flat, with her lips compressed a little, and her head held rather high, and Fraquet followed her gloomily.

John did not invite Mrs. Fraquet to go with him further than the back blocks of the half-way world. Beyond that was the slum area of which Park Road was the highway, and here in mean streets was the doctor's chief practice. Here also he had many friends, and, curiously; they were his most profitable patients. In Intellectual Mansions payment was postponed until a new book was published or a new play produced, or until a cheque had come for an article still unpublished. But in Poverty Court many people made a point of paying cash down. It is true that the payments were in shillings and sixpences—for ointment on a black eye, for sewing up a broken head, for advice on "house-maid's knee," for plastering the cuts on small boys' knees, and for advice on all the aches and pains of people who worked in rain and fogs and snow, who slept in overcrowded rooms, and to whom physical fitness was the greatest blessing of life, enabling them to go on earning twelve shillings a week, and to thrust back the hungry wolf from the door. But these small sums mounted up and helped John le Dreux to pay his own rent, to buy his sister the clothes she needed for her social adventures (though not so many as she desired), and to keep up his position in that station of life to which it had pleased God, and Madge le Dreux, to call him.

John was willing to forego payment for some of his services. He could see that in many of these little houses



in mean streets the cupboard was often bare, and that a rainy week, or a fortnight in bed, had brought a working couple to the edge of ruin. But it was a point of honour with most of these people to pay the doctor—almost a superstition.

"It's like this, Doc'," said one of his patients, who was in the vegetable line of business with a hand-barrow. "There ain't no chanst for the like of me if I ain't got the blimy strength to 'oller. The lahder I ken 'oller the quicker I ken sell my marrers, or my taters, or what not. If I doesn't 'oller I doesn't sell. If I doesn't sell I ken take my blimy chice of the wukus or the river. Strike me! When you guv me a new vice with them there pasteels o' yourn, you guv me a new spell of this giddy old life in the street. So what I sez to meself, I sez, is pie the doc' like a man, Bert, and don't you forgit it."

And after this long speech, which made him as red in the face as the scarf round his neck, he spun up a two-shilling piece, caught it on the back of his hand, spat on it, and held it out to the doctor.

"Keep it till next time," said John.

The young coster stared at him with an almost fierce expression.

"No bloomin' fear!" he said. "I ain't agoin' to tempt proverdence like that. I don't want ter meet *nex' time* rahnd the corner of the fust street I passes, lookin' me straight i' the mug and tellin' me 'you ain't paid the doc', Bert. Come along of me, my man, I've kep' a nice little death for them as goes tick to the doc'."

A first-class fellow was this Bert Uggins, coster, and when he wasn't in drink, or beating his wife, or doing seven days for defying police regulations, had a delightful gaiety of heart. John often passed him in the Park Road when he was selling vegetable marrows, or boiled oranges, with an oratory which would have carried him far in higher spheres of life. He had a genius for catching the eye of a frowsy woman doing her Saturday night's shopping, or of a workman going homeward with his bag of tools on his shoulder.

"I don't asks you to buy," he would say. "Jest come and have a look at 'em, that's all. Don't they smile at yer? Why, they're jest achin' to sit on yer plate. Look at this feller? Plump, ain't 'e? You couldn't git a plumper



marrer not if you was to walk from 'ere to the Ole Kent Road. Try 'im biled with a little butter and jest a speck o' pepper an' salt! You'll thank Gord you was born to feel 'ungry. What, you ain't agoing to 'ave it! Well, you doesn't know a good thing when it stares you in the eyes. Threepence too much for you? Strike me! I paid thrupence-a'penny for it myself. I'm giving 'em away, and losing every time. Strike me blind if I ain't!"

Bert Uggins had married when he was eighteen, and that was five years ago, and when his wife was sixteen. They had two children and a new-born baby, and considered themselves happy and prosperous. The wife was a "hand" in a box factory at Nine Elms, to which she tramped, wet or fine, every morning at five o'clock, while the children were "looked after" by an old woman who charged twopence a day for attendance on the offspring of working-women. Bert was out in the streets until ten o'clock each night, and on weekdays only saw his children in bed. But on Sundays he washed their faces with his own hands, dressed them in cast-off clothes which he had received in the spring in return for pots of geraniums, and wheeled them into the park in a wooden perambulator, which he had made out of packing cases and wheels picked up separately from a dealer in scrap-iron. He was as proud as a lord of his respectability and social standing on these Sunday morning strolls with his offspring, and John saw him once on one of the park seats smoking a clay pipe with an air of ineffable satisfaction. The baby was asleep, with its bald head flopping over the edge of the wooden cart, and the two children were howling lustily. But Bert was entirely undisturbed by this shrill clamour, and with a pink paper spread out on his knee and his pipe warming his nose, studied the sporting news with a peaceful concentration of mind.

John went to tea one Saturday afternoon, and was introduced to Mrs. Uggins. She was a thin, pale-faced girl, with a big fringe low down on her forehead, and dressed in a blue velveteen skirt below a lace blouse cut low at the neck, and with short sleeves above her sharp elbows. She quarrelled incessantly with Bert, and slapped her children as opportunity offered, but otherwise was a good wife and affectionate mother.

"Fetch the doctor a chair, Liz, can't yer?" said Bert, when John came in.



"Nah then, shut yer jaw," said Liz. "Ain't I a doin' of it, silly?"

Bert looked over at the doctor and winked solemnly, as though he were proud of his wife's power of repartee.

"Keep them brats quiet for Gord's sake," he said. "We can't 'ear ourselves speak, with such a 'ell of a noise. 'Ere, 'Orace, I'll give you a thick ear if you doesn't be'ave yerself before the gentleman."

"Leave the kid alone, can't yer?" said Mrs. Uggins. "Anybody would think I can't manage my own brats."

And with that she gave her eldest born a smart slap, vowing she would skin him alive if he didn't hold his tongue.

After these preliminaries the tea-party proceeded very nicely. Bert had provided a pint of shrimps, and set a good example by picking off their heads and tails and eating them with a touch of vinegar.

"'Elp yerself, Doc," he said genially. "There's plenty more wur them came from."

Mrs. Uggins poured out the tea into good solid cups, warranted not to break when dropped on the floor, and Bert poured out his own steaming liquid into his saucer and drank it noisily.

"Strike me!" he said. "It's as 'ot as the Old 'Un! Mind yer mouth, Doc."

Mrs. Uggins went off into a shriek of laughter. "'E's tryin' to teach yer manners, Doctor! It's just like Bert's blasted cheek!"

"Nah, look 'ere, Liz," said Bert, staring at her severely, "I s'pose you don't want me to give you a damn good 'iding before visitors? Because that's what'll 'appen if you don't keep a civil tongue in yer face."

Mrs. Uggins lifted up the teapot. "It's not the fust time I've broken crockery agin yer 'ead," she said.

Bert burst into a loud guffaw, and slapped his knee.

"Ain't she a fair cough-drop?" he said, appealing to the doctor. "My Liz 'as a sense of 'umour, I will say that for 'er."

After the meal, and while Mrs. Uggins was washing up and putting the babies to bed—both of which operations took place in the adjoining chamber—Bert produced a threepenny packet of cigarettes and, with unbounded generosity, insisted upon John smoking one after another. He himself preferred his old clay pipe, which he filled with black

twist. In the heavy atmosphere thus evolved, he gazed round his parlour with a contented grin, and indulged in post-prandial philosophy.

"'Tain't every bloke 'as a crib like this," he said. "Comfort, and a little hart to heducate the heye—them's been my hideas. Pretty good, them prints, ain't they? Got 'em from the Christinas numbers, and frimed 'em meself. I fust learnt the tiste for pictures studyin' the 'oardings. They're the things for colour! Fair knocks you in the heye, so that you can't 'elp lookin' at 'em, and drawn as true as life."

He confessed to being a contented man, having climbed pretty high since he left the workhouse, where he happened to be born of unknown parents. He didn't want to go much higher, though a moke would look well between the shafts of his barrow. Of course, he admitted, he had his rubs. The police were down on him week in, week out. He only hoped he wouldn't have to kill one of them, and end his happy life by a short drop. That was the thing he was afraid of. He had a bit of a temper. It had been born with him, he supposed, like his face, which he couldn't help, and made him see red when it got the better of him. Not that he regretted knocking Liz about now and then. It did her good, and she was pretty handy herself. Oh, they were good pals; but still—his temper was a bit awkward, at times.

"I would get a grip on it, if I were you," said John. "I have got a bit of a temper myself, so I know."

"'Ave you, now?" said Bert, looking at him with amazement. "Well, strike me pink; I never should 'ave thought it!"

It seemed to him a rare joke, and he laughed heartily, with his hands on his knees, and then called out to his wife:

"Liz!" he shouted, in a voice which made the room shake. "What d'yer think? The doc' sez he's got a bit of a temper hisself!"

"Not 'e!" cried Liz, in a shrill voice, which overpowered the cries of her newborn babe. "I don't b'lieve 'e would 'arm a flea!"

"She doesn't think you'd 'urt a louse!" said Bert, laughing again with hoarse mirth.

"Well, I nearly killed a man once," said John quietly. And he told the story of the blacksmith's thrashing in the Yorkshire town.



Bert listened to the tale with joyful admiration, rubbing his hands and slapping his knees when it reached its climax with the broken whip.

"My Gord!" he said. "It does me good to 'ear that. Well done, Doc'. I'd 'ave given a week's takin's to see you do it—swelp me bob, I would!"

"Yes," said John; "but you might have been the blacksmith!"

"Oh! I didn't think of that," said Bert, rubbing his unshaven chin thoughtfully.

The evening passed pleasantly enough, and John learnt a good deal about the philosophy of life in mean streets. On the whole, it seemed to be a cheerful philosophy, but with a strong strain of fatalism. These people—Bert's "pals" and neighbours—seemed to live on a thin crust above an abyss. A few weeks of illness, the closing down of a factory, a bad building season, sent them through the crust, into the underworld. They never came up again. It was doss-house, workhouse, or prison for the rest of their days. Their friends saw them go down with regret, said, "Poor old Bill," or "Poor old Pard," but rejoiced that they had still the earth under their own feet. They knew, if they thought about the matter at all, that their time might come next. But they preferred not to think about it, and, with a fatalistic faith, said, "What's the odds, so long as you're 'appy?" John found most of them surprisingly happy, like Bert Uggins. It is true that, like Bert, also, they had their "rubs," but John discovered that people who eat kippers for supper while they sat without coats had a heartier appetite than men of letters who dined in evening dress on four courses of pseudo-French cookery, and that there was often more simple laughter in the parlours of fried fish-shops, and other small shops down the Park Road, than in the drawing-rooms of the street of mansions, where conversation was much more intellectual.

Another interesting fact of sociology, not altogether unobserved by modern philosophers, was that the mothers in the mean streets had many more children than those in the mansions, and that the size of a family increased with the narrowness of its financial income. Sit-down teas with Bert Uggins and labouring men of various grades in the district convinced John le Dreux that imaginative writers often exaggerate the greys and blacks of Poverty Court. One of



his clients, a journalist of Intellectual Mansions, had lately been describing in a series of vivid pen-pictures, that outward life in such streets as Park Road. With that happy journalistic instinct for a good title, he had called these sketches "Highways in Hell," and had depicted the most gloomy visions of blear-eyed, frowsy, grief-worn women, of men haggard with despair, of little children weeping in hungry misery.

It was all untrue. John had gone into several awful "homes" where starvation had encamped on the naked boards, and he had seen grown men shed big tears weakly because another day had gone without work, and another day was coming, and he had seen women with hard, pinched faces, desperate and cruel, or weak and whining, because they had lost everything and could get nothing. Worst of all he had seen children shrinking and cowering before the brutality of the people who had given them life, and of life itself.

But these things were true only in individual cases, they were not true of the mass. To a stranger, walking down the Park Road on a Saturday night, it would all seem very squalid, very brutal, very ugly. But among the costers shouting their wares hoarsely was Bert Uggins, a contented man, and proud of having attained all but the topmost peak of his ambition—on which browsed a "moke"—and among the men in corduroys, and the drab women turning over chunks of meat on the cheap trays, and bargaining for a penny off the price of a cabbage, there were patients of the doctor round the corner who paid his fees—while clients on immeasurably greater incomes were too "hard up" to send him a cheque—and who, in their little dwellings with their grubby children, found a happiness of activity and health and cheery courage, denied in many cases to men and women struggling for the laurels of fame.

There were exceptions on both sides. John thought, and smiled at the thought, of that young married couple who found life such a "rummy go"—the Editor of *The Ladies' Magazine* and his child-wife. They were happy enough, and laughed light-heartedly.

And in the Park Road there were men—though few women—who fretted at their fate, and who struck their hands against the bars of life, and who struggled, just as feverishly as those in Intellectual Mansions, to climb the ladder of fame and fortune. Curiously, these malcontents



were also the intellectuals of their social sphere. John wondered at the significance of that.

He became closely acquainted with one of these men, and was deeply interested in his personality. He saw him first, and several times, at the corner of the Park Road, and stood arrested by a white, thin, clean-shaven face—with a dark stubble round his chin—and burning eyes under a bowler hat, which looked down on a small crowd of labouring men and street boys from a wooden box under a gaslight. His voice, thin and high-pitched, and strained beyond the man's strength, rang out fiercely, and his right arm went up and down like a sledge-hammer, with the fist striking the palm of his left hand. In the gaslight John saw that each time the man made this gesture of emphasis and defiance, he revealed a bare arm within the sleeve of a ragged overcoat. He noticed also, that he was a young man with a thin, good-looking face and eyes, in which there was a feverish light, and brown hair worn longer than usual among men of his class.

Then John listened to his words. The fellow was a demagogue preaching revolt. Like others of his class, he denounced the "idle rich," and those who had robbed the people of their land, who grew fat in the sweated labour of the poor, and crushed them into the mire under "relentless heels." But his chief hatred seemed to be for the middle classes. According to his philosophy, they were the worst enemies of the people. They stood between the great lords and their slaves. But for them there would not be a lord left in England, and the slaves would have cast off their shackles. They were the panderers of the nobility, and their lick-spittles. They were the defenders of feudalism and prerogative and privilege, of all the old mummeries and tyrannies of the aristocracy, because each of them in his heart had the secret hope of climbing up to those heights, of getting honours and titles and wealth.

"Snobs and sycophants as they are," cried the man with the white face and the burning eyes, "we must first attack the middle classes before we spring at the throats of our titled tyrants!"

He waved his arm towards the street of mansions behind Park Road.

"There," he said, "is one of the highways of the snobs! Have you seen them sitting at dinner in their evening-clothes



with the electric light shining on their stiff white shirts? My God, while they pretend to be great people, those little snobs forget that a hundred yards away the sweated poor are wallowing in their squalor. Those men and women are writing dainty books filled with the gospel of snobbishness. They are painting pretty-pretty pictures inspired by the old traditions of humbug. They are telling tales of frail love and foolish conceits, while here, behind them, in the back streets, life—*Life*, I say, my brothers—my life, your life, the life of the people, is throbbing in its misery, and crying out for vengeance!"

It was the usual oratory of the street demagogue, yet touched here and there by a glint of real imagination as when he spoke of "the fair land of England with silence brooding over many vast acres of beauty which God had made for the music of the sickle and of the plough, and of the laughter of children in the homesteads of the people, but which had been kept desolate by rich robbers for their parks and pleasancesses and game preserves." And, here and there, in spite of his Cockney accent, the thin-faced young man with the feverish eyes showed a knowledge of history beyond the elementary scraps picked up by his class in the State schools, as when he spoke of Danton and Robespierre, and Marat, the "heroes" (as he called them) of the French Revolution.

John le Dreux listened to this hot-gospeller of social revolt, and studied a type of humanity with whom previously he was unacquainted. But he was even more interested in the effect of the speech upon the crowd. It did not stir them to any sign of passionate enthusiasm, or to any ferocity of indignation against the classes denounced by the orator; a few of the younger men, obviously mechanics, said, "Hear, hear," and "Shame!" and "Quite right, friend," when the speaker paused for a moment after some violent period, but the other working men around listened stolidly, and for the most part in silence, though occasionally they gave a hoarse guffaw, as if amused by the exaggeration of the man's claims.

"'Ot stuff!" said one of them close to John, and his friend laughed and said, "Bally rot, I call it. Live and let live is my motter."

John saw and listened to the street orator several times on a Saturday night, and was always attracted by the man's white face under the gaslight and by his thin vibrant voice.



Then one evening he was summoned to attend a patient in the Park Road by a slatternly girl who came to the door of the flat and said:

"Will you ask the doctor to come round at onst! Mr. Fitchett is took bad and can't 'ardly 'old is 'ead up. And I would do anythink in the wide world for 'im, I would, to say nuffink of darnin' is socks, which I do regular. And the address is 72, Park Road, over the undertaker's, and next to Bulging, the baker."

John put on his boots, cursing softly to himself because he had only been home half an hour, and then with a word to his sister—"Back soon, Madge"—went off on his duty.

He knew the undertaker's shop in the Park Road. It was brightly lighted up as usual, and half a dozen men were polishing and planing the packing-cases of death. They were doing their work cheerily, humming a music-hall ditty to the tattoo of the master's hammer as he spat out tacks and knocked them in with swift dexterity and unerring aim. The undertaker came forward and greeted the doctor with genial deference.

"Any orders this evening, doctor? No. Well, I could do with some. A big stock, and all shapes and sizes ready for any customer at a moment's notice. Beautiful, ain't they? Look at that polish. You can see your face in it." He smoothed his hand over one of the coffin lids as though he loved it. "It's almost too good for our class of business, but I never stint in the finishing off! Nasty weather, doctor, but good for you and me! Oh, there will be lots turned off in this sharp wind. I'm getting ready for 'em. Can't be caught napping, you know."

"You've got a sick man upstairs, haven't you?" said John, cutting short this professional monologue.

"Yes, one of the missus' lodgers. Young Fitchett. A nice fellow, but a bit queer in the upper story, to my thinking."

He tapped his forehead and winked solemnly at the doctor.

"Pretty bad, too. If it wouldn't 'urt 'is feelings, I would like to take 'is measurement. *Nunquam non paratus*, as my old schoolmaster used to say."

John went upstairs and found the slatternly girl waiting for him on the landing. Her eyes were red and swollen with crying.

"'E's agroanin' 'orribly," she said, and then tapped at

the door and said, "Mr. 'Enery, dear, 'ere's the doctor come to see you."

When John went in he saw a young unshaven man in a ragged dressing-gown, huddled up in a horsehair armchair close to the fire. John recognised him at once. It was the orator of the street corner.

"Well, what's the matter?" said John, in his quiet cheerful way.

"The very devil!" said Mr. Henry Fitchett, groaning and putting his hands to his head. "I suppose I've got to die, curse it, and my work is only just begun."

His eyes were burning like live coals in his dead-white face.

"Die?" said John. "Not just yet, if I can help it. Let's have a look at you."

He felt the man's forehead. "Pretty hot, isn't it?"

"Hot as hell. And I've got a steam-hammer in my brain."

He shivered.

"Now I've got icicles down my back. Yes, ague, that's what it is! My death will lie at the door of the aristocrats. They've murdered me, curse them! However, I've made my will, and left my stinking corpse to the tyrant rich. That will be my last word of protest against the damnable injustice of life."

It was evident to John that the man was slightly delirious.

"I'm afraid that protest will have to wait," he said. "You're not going to die just yet, my man. You've got a touch of influenza, that's all."

"What! With these red-hot irons in my bones!" said Fitchett.

He was astonished and almost disappointed. He was to be robbed of his last revenge! But he consoled himself.

"Well, if you pull me through, I will go on to the last gasp. As long as I have breath I will denounce the enemies of the people."

"My dear fellow," said John, "don't denounce anybody just now. Keep yourself quiet and warm, and take a stiff dose of quinine. I will send some round to you."

He had a few more words with the man and soothed him down, so that when he left the young demagogue took his hand, and clasped it tightly with his thin, hot fingers.

"Doctors are the only people in the middle class for



whom I have any respect," he said. "They come face to face with the realities of life."

"Thanks," said John. "I'll look in to-morrow."

On the landing there was the slatternly girl again. "Doctor," she whispered, "is 'e goin' to die? Father says he's goin' to measure 'im to-night—and, oh, my Gord, 'ow I love that man! I don't care who knows it, neither, that I don't!"

She threw her apron over her head and sobbed into it.

"Die?" said John. "Bosh. He'll be speaking at the street corner next Saturday week. And tell your father, with my compliments, that if he measures living men for coffins, I'll put the police on to him."

"What, isn't he agoin' to die?" said the girl, unveiling her tear-stained face. "Well, I'm jiggered!"

She seemed amazed at this reprieve, and John thought he detected the same tone of disappointment which had crept into the voice of Henry Fitchett himself when the doctor gave his verdict. John was not surprised at this strange psychological freak. He had experience enough to know already that among poorer classes the drama of death has a curious fascination and excitement which rob it of some of its horror.

During his visits to the room above the undertaker's workshop John became very friendly with young Fitchett and had long conversations with him on social politics. He discovered that the man was a watchmaker by trade, and that he had educated himself into what he called "free thought" and the "gospel of revolution," by attending classes at the Polytechnic and by reading in his lonely rooms, and late into the nights, the revolutionary literature of the world's history. On the deal shelves of the bed-sitting-room there was a collection of those books—tattered volumes of Tolstoy, Rousseau's "Social Contract," the lives of the Encyclopædists, several histories of the French Revolution, Fabian pamphlets and paper-covered booklets of the Social Democratic Federation. Upon the walls hung a print of the execution of Camille Desmoulins, Rouget de Lisle singing "La Marseillaise," and old newspaper drawings of the Peterloo Massacre and the Chartist riots.

In the room where these books and pictures were the silent witnesses of the eternal spirit of revolt against the inequality of wealth, sat Henry Fitchett, the young watch-

maker and demagogue, with his thin hands beating the tablecloth and his eyes inflamed with a passion of class hatred, as he talked and argued with the doctor in long monologues which John interrupted only by a word or two of correction or criticism.

"Leave the world to take care of itself and attend to your watchmaking, my dear fellow."

That was one of his remarks which roused the watchmaker to an almost furious self-defence.

Another argument seemed to sting the fellow more than anything John said.

"It seems to me," said John, "that men like you do nothing for your own class except to make them discontented with their lot. They are cheerful enough if you leave them to themselves. My dear fellow, believe me, your twopenny-halfpenny philosophy is quite futile. It has made you a bad watchmaker—you tell me you loathe your trade—and a restless, fretful man. What do you want? To raise yourself and your 'brothers,' as you call them, to the position of your hated middle class to 'intellectualise' them, and put them into flats facing the park instead of in the back streets! That seems to me particularly foolish. They would become overcivilised, and oversensitive, like the people for whom I prescribe nerve tonics and rest cures."

Young Fitchett let forth the floodgates of his eloquence in answer to these "damned reactionary sentiments," as he called them, and shouted so loudly and banged the table so fiercely that John had to call him to order.

"Don't get so excited. We are not talking in a sea-gale."

Then 'Enery sat back in his chair with a short bitter laugh, and said:

"You are just like the rest of the world—deaf to arguments and utterly callous to the sufferings of the people!"

"I notice you always talk of the People as if they all live in the Park Road," said John. "There are lots of them in more expensive streets. You can't divide us into separate strata. We are mixed up like motes in a sunbeam. It takes all classes to make a nation."

"Cheap philosophy and false economics!" said young Fitchett sneeringly.

There were times when his rudeness was so deliberate that John was tempted to punch his head, and yet for some



reason he could not help liking this young fanatic. Beneath his revolutionary violence, and his crude, half-educated idealism of liberty, there was a touch of poetry in his nature, and he had a genuine love of knowledge, so that after his day's work he would sit up half the night to tear the life out of a book. But there was a strain of hysteria in his mental fibre, and an intellectual feverishness which threatened to burn out his vitality too soon.

"One of these days," said John, "you'll have your head bashed in by a policeman's truncheon in Trafalgar Square."

"I ask nothing better," said young Fitchett, raising his eyes to the picture of Camille Desmoulins on the scaffold.

"All right," said John. "As long as you don't mind nobody else will."

The remark was brutal, but John's medical instinct as well as his own sturdiness of character taught him not to pander with the emotionalism of a sentiment which was partly founded upon vanity and morbid egotism.

Yet he was interested in Fitchett, the demagogue, as he was in Bert Uggins the coster, and in many other characters in the back streets of Lavender Park; and when he went back to the flat to find his sister shut up in her room writing a romance, or Fraquet talking of art and letters in a low voice in a half-darkened room, or women-writers drinking tea with Madge and bemoaning the state of the literary market, and the stupidity of the public, he thought that life was a bigger thing perhaps than was known by some of those intellectual people who wrote the clever books which he had no time to read.

## CHAPTER XI

JOHN had become very friendly with the three girls upstairs—or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that they had become very friendly with him. Being a man of a somewhat reserved nature, and diffident of his own social qualities, he would have plodded at his profession for years without making friendships more intimate than acquaintanceship with his patients, unless other people had gone out of their way to drag him out of his rut. That was what the three girls in the fourth-floor flat did for him. For some reason or other which he could never understand, they desired his friendship and were determined to have it, willy nilly, and they made a "dead set" at him in the frankest possible way.

At least Winifred Vernon, author of "Sweetheart and I," and other serial stories, was very candid in her methods. She discovered the hours when he was least likely to be called out and most likely to be at home—generally between seven and nine in the evening—and thrust herself upon his privacy with unblushing audacity.

"It is not a bit of good looking as if you wished me in the middle of next week," she would say, dropping into the arm-chair of his smoking-room—which was also his consulting-room—"for, as it happens, I am in the middle of *this* week, and in the middle of your flat, and here I am going to stay while you talk to me nicely, and let me smoke some of your charming cigarettes. Thanks—and a match, if you please."

Of course she did most of the talking, and John was quite amused to listen to her, and glad of her company, because it was a bit lonely for him at home now that Madge went out so much into intellectual circles beyond his ken. And Winifred Vernon was a companionly, sisterly girl, "without any nonsense about her," as he put it to himself. He liked to see her wandering about his room, while he smoked his pipe, and watched her through the smoke, staring



at his bottles, asking gruesome questions as to the effects of various poisons on the human body, or picking up his surgical instruments and studying them with a cold-blooded curiosity which was partly assumed, because they seemed to have a grim attraction for her.

"If only God had made me a doctor instead of a writer," she said once. "It is so much more noble and useful to carve off people's maimed limbs and to tidy up the human body, than to concoct love-stories among puppets who never lived."

"It's only butcher's work," said John, "and rather messy. There is nothing very noble about it."

"Well, we won't quarrel on the subject," said Winifred, in her calm, dogmatic way. "I say it's noble work, and in my opinion, doctors are the great heroes of civilisation. If you don't hold the same opinion, that is because of the modesty which will be your ruin."

She always ended an argument with a dogmatic assertion like this, but John allowed her the last word. It was pleasant, he thought, to watch her sitting with her feet on the fender and her skirt tucked up a little, and her face propped in the palms of her hands, as she leant forward, staring into the fire. That was a characteristic habit of hers when she was in a serious mood, and inclined to be thoughtful and philosophical. Then the firelight would flicker ruddily upon her face with its firm little nose and mouth and pointed chin, and glint in the coils and curls of her hair, revealing hidden gold. She was sometimes very serious, though always amusing in her habit of darting a sudden question at John upon problems of vast complexity, as if she expected an immediate and conclusive answer.

Thus, one evening she said, "What do you think of love?"

"Good Lord!" said John, "that is a big question."

"Well, you must have some thoughts on the subject," said Winifred. "It is not a subject one can altogether ignore, is it?"

"No," said John. "I suppose not."

"That is no answer," said Winifred. "Pull yourself together, and let me hear your views. Ever been in love yourself?"

John went back over one or two early episodes of his career, rejected them on second thoughts, and said:

"Never, to the best of my belief."

"It is time you began," said Winifred. "A great, simple-hearted, honest fellow like you ought to have been deeply in love long before this, or novelists are not to be justified."

She spoke jestingly, but John shifted in his chair.

"Look here, don't let us be personal. Tell me what you think of love. Of course, you must have had heaps of lovers!"

"Who's personal now?" said Winifred.

But, after this obvious retort, she was willing to oblige him with her views. She began by a candid confession.

"It is curious—I am like you. I have written hundreds of love-stories, long and short, and yet I have no love-story of my own. Nobody has ever done to me anything I make my lovers do. No one has ever pressed my hand longer than the regulation time, and no tall man, with curly hair, has ever led me into a conservatory, and, intoxicated with the fragrance of my hair—I always use Harlene—has breathed down my neck and said, with passionate emotion, 'Darling! I love you better than my own life!'"

She laughed, and turned round to look at John. "Do men say these things?"

"I wonder?" said John thoughtfully.

"They don't, of course," said Winifred. "That is just the absurdity of it. The love that is written about in novels does not exist. It is as old-fashioned as the mediæval code of chivalry, and just as unreal."

"Well, what do you call real love?" said John.

"To my mind," said Winifred, "real love is just a great friendship between a man and a woman, a good comradeship which makes them like to be together. They find out that they have ideas in common, they can understand each other's jokes, they laugh at the silly old world together, and they know that if they might live with one another always, there is a chance they would still be good pals and not bore each other too much. That is real love, isn't it?"

She turned to John again, and asked the question rather eagerly, as though anxious for him to confirm her statement.

"I fancy there is something beyond all that," said John quietly. "Passion, for instance."

"Oh, passion!" she said, rather scornfully. "That has been invented by writers of plays and novels!"



"I fancy it was invented before they arrived on the scene," said John.

"Yes; when men were brutes," said Winifred. "But we are in a state of civilisation now. Men don't go about murdering each other for the sake of a woman. Anyhow, I hold that love—decent love, I mean—is just a glorified friendship. That is what women want—a good, true friend to look after them and save them from the little worries of life, especially—dear Lord!—the little worry of earning a living; a nice, quiet friend with a sense of humour, to keep them company in the evening and take away the feeling of loneliness, which is so horrible to women. They want to feel that they belong to somebody and that somebody belongs to them. Don't you think it is good for a man and a woman to make a bond of friendship like that?"

"Yes. All that must be rather good," said John. "And I suppose babies would come to keep things jolly?"

"Do you like babies?" said Winifred.

"Rather," said John.

Winifred drew a deep breath and stared into the fire, as though she saw merry baby faces in its dancing flames.

"Oh yes," she said, "that is what every woman wants. The husband does not matter very much. It is only the babies that matter."

"But some women don't want children at all," said John. "They find them a great hindrance to the little pleasures of life, and to their work."

He thought of the professional women in the street of mansions. They were not very enthusiastic on the subject of babies.

"Yes," said Winifred; "I know those women. There are a lot of them down this alley. They take themselves very seriously, and think their work is the most important thing in life, as if they had a mission to convert the world to the pure gospel as it is written in six-shilling novels. Or they want to share all the pleasures of their husbands and to shun all the little bothers of womanhood. I think the men connive at this. They think it 'deuced rough' on the women to stay at home minding babies and looking after maidservants. It is mostly the men's fault. They like to show their women to the world in pretty frocks, and to see them making their way into the higher circle by means of a society manner, or a good hand at bridge, or by a little notoriety as writers and actresses and secretaries of societies.



"It doesn't work, of course. After some years of it the woman finds that she has missed something, and that there is a frightful gap in her life. Society is no longer exciting to her, and other women have left her behind in notoriety. So the crows-feet come round her eyes, and she cannot hide them with the powder-puff, and she becomes withered—a discontented, restless, sour-tempered woman, hating the happier woman whose children fill their homes with laughter. If only she had had one child—just one little one! But she is lonely, and has made a horrible failure of her life. Oh, I know those women, and they deserve their fate.

"But then, you see, my dear Dr. John, there are other women just as miserable, who have not had the same chance. That is the very dickens of it all! Why didn't God make enough husbands to go round, I wonder? It is a ridiculous business, altogether. The world at present is made up largely of women who marry and don't want babies, and of women who would like to have babies and can't marry. Between them these two classes cause all the seething discontent and restlessness which is called 'The Revolt of Womanhood' in the halfpenny papers and by halfpenny philosophers. What do you think the struggle for Women Suffrage means? Do you think women want a vote to sit in Parliament and legislate in the Conservative or Liberal interests? Not a bit of it! They are impelled by vague passionate desire to put things right with themselves, to find the things they have missed, to fill up the horrible gaps in their life.

"I am all for Woman's Suffrage. I would be a militant suffragist to-morrow if I had time and enough pluck. But I should not know what to do with a vote if I had it, and I haven't the slightest idea what the 'programme' is to be when we get the franchise. I only know that it is a wild and glorious dream of fighting for the land of hearts' desire, and of rearranging matters so that we may all have a share of the good things. See?"

"I don't see altogether," said John. "It strikes me your argument is somewhat vague and incoherent; but I have no doubt you are quite right."

"Of course, I am quite right," said Winifred. "And as for being vague and incoherent, isn't that the matter with life itself? Do any of us creatures here below know what we are struggling for?"



"I am struggling to earn a decent living to provide Madge with dresses and pocket-money," said John. "That is as far as I go."

"Poor Madge!" said Winifred. "She thinks she is having a great time. London has got hold of her, and she finds it deliriously exciting. Poor child! When will she wake up to see the stupidity of it all?"

"So long as she is happy I don't want her to wake up," said John; and Winifred said, "Nice big brother! If only I had one in my flat upstairs!"

She contrived to have the next best thing by taking John upstairs, and making him at home there on many afternoons and evenings when he had no work to do. And, although at first he made excuses, and resisted as much as possible, being a shy fellow in the society of women, he soon slid into the habit of spending leisure hours in that fourth-storey flat, where three girls made much of him, and let him fill their rooms with tobacco smoke, and cooked cocoa for him, and insisted upon him sharing their little meals of sardines on toast, followed by twopenny tartlets, warmed up in the gas-stove, and talked to him on every conceivable subject, and many inconceivable subjects, with quite sisterly candour and simplicity.

John saw that each of the three girls had a definite place of her own in the republic of the flat. Winifred was the presiding genius and Chief Consul. She issued edicts and criticised the execution of them, and her dominant spirit was seldom challenged. Patsy was the decorative lady, and provided the æsthetic side in this scheme of things. She was thoroughly lazy in delightful tea-gowns made out of remnants from Liberty's put together by a few stitches and plenty of pins, and the walls were adorned by her sketches in colour and charcoal. Bernadine Brett was the Cinderella of the flat, and did most of the necessary household duties in a quiet, business-like way, without any fussing.

Winifred kept the common purse, but Bernadine did the shopping. Winifred suggested the *carte de jour*, and Bernadine cooked the meals. Patsy bought flowers and Bernadine arranged them. The dominant girl and the artistic girl depended for their comfort in life upon the useful girl—which is a very fair synopsis of life itself—and they were extremely wretched and ill-at-ease when, as sometimes happened, her journalistic duties took Bernadine out of town for several



days, or kept her out-of-doors from early morning till late at night. Then chaos reigned, and Patsy, second in command, languished in a litter of picturesque disorder, and Winifred went without her early cup of tea in bed, and was like a beautiful lady bear with a very sore ear for at least an hour, when she would throw away her writing-blook, spring out of bed, and in her ragged dressing-gown, have an orgy of tidying up, in order to demonstrate to all whom it might concern that she, Winifred Vernon, author of "Sweetheart and I," and some others, was not a mere literary lady, but a person of practical knowledge in domestic economy. Her efforts generally failed ignominiously, for, in spite of furious rows with Patsy, that artistic young lady was temperamentally untidy, and, when bereft of Bernadine, lapsed altogether into primitive, natural slovenliness.

Patsy was very happy when John stretched his long legs out in the drawing-room of their six-roomed flat. She told him, in spite of his blushes, that he had a beautiful face, and that the line between his nose and his eyebrows was simply wonderful, and that she would give ever so much to put his serious mouth on to canvas. She did her best to achieve this ambition, and wherever he sat in the room Patsy was sure to be in an opposite corner measuring the length of his nose with a stick of pencil and making sketches of him in different positions. Having made an immense number of these sketches she announced very seriously that she intended to make an Academy portrait of him in oils. There was just time to do it before sending-in day if he would be very good and kind and give her a few regular sittings.

John vowed that he would rather be boiled in oil than painted in oils; but Patsy took his refusal so much to heart, and regarded him for several days with such reproach-haunting eyes, that he relented, and consented.

Winifred had been on his side, and had protested bluntly to Patsy against wasting the valuable time of a man who went about curing people's bodies of every imaginable and horrible disease. She said that Patsy was an enemy to humanity in asking such a thing, and that she merely wanted to pander to her vanity and find an excuse for monopolising John's company in order to talk high art and high fiddlesticks to him.

Patsy was furious at this, and nearly poked Winifred's



eye out with her mahlstick (in a little tussle that took place between them), and then sat moping with something very like tears in her eyes, until Winifred, who had a sharp tongue, but a warm heart, put her arm round her neck and kissed her on the tip of her nose, and vowed that she had not meant to be a beast, and that John should sit for the portrait if he had to be tied to his chair.

John found it quite amusing to have his portrait painted, though his professional work caused him to interrupt the sittings a good deal. All he had to do, after preliminary experiments, was to smoke innumerable pipes, and to sit still in an attitude of carefully careless ease. To Patsy it was a time of perfect bliss. Before beginning the great portrait she made for herself a new frock of flowered muslin and an overall of brown holland tied up with pink bows. She then bought a canvas five feet six inches by four feet eight inches, and having placed it on her easel regarded its unstained purity with something like awe and joyful anxiety. Then for an hour she devoted herself to the task of discovering John's most characteristic attitude, pushing his head a little on one side, touching him under the chin with her delicate finger-tips as a sign to raise his head a little, and arranging the careless pose of his left hand with infinite trouble and artistic scrutiny, with half-shut eyes, until it was just right.

Unfortunately as the hour was completed John's maid-servant came round with a message summoning him to a patient; and in spite of Patsy's almost agonised appeal to stay until she had sketched this attitude in rough outline he felt bound to attend to his professional duty. The next sitting was not interrupted, but Patsy did not get far with her work. It was so interesting, she said, to explain her ideas to a man who understood.

"I do not want to paint your features only," she said. "That is mere photographic realism. I want to depict your soul, to put down the mystery of your eyes, and the meaning behind those lines about your mouth."

"The devil you do!" said John, taken completely by surprise.

It was probably for the purpose of understanding his soul and of reading the mystery of his eyes, in order to put them down on canvas, that Patsy did more talking than painting. After a few touches of paint had been put down, and



after reconnoitring the general effect at five yards' distance Patsy would stick the end of her long brush through the thumb-hole of her palette, and, holding on to the easel in a charmingly graceful attitude, would talk about her life's devotion to art, and about the pure joy of artistic creation, and about the psychological mystery of colour.

"Every primary colour," she explained, "symbolises a simple emotion or idea, blue for innocence and purity, yellow for gladness and golden joy, red for passion. I should go mad if I lived in a red room. I can only be virtuous and light-hearted in pale shades of blue and pink. Thus with infinite colour-tones you get the whole harmony of the heart and soul."

"Good Lord!" said John, puffing at his pipe. "That makes painting much more complicated than I had any notion."

"Ah!" said Patsy, pleased with this astonishment. "Life is not long enough for art. There is always so much to learn. To be an artist is to be continually a student getting a little nearer to the truth, day by day. I first discovered that at the Slade School."

Life was Patsy's theme at other sittings, the "Life Beautiful" (as she called it) belonging to men and women who live for ideals and who follow the quest of the Infinite Unattainable Beauty, whithersoever it leads them; the beauty of colour, form, sound, movement, and thought.

"It is glorious to think that one is numbered among the disciples of this divine mission," she said, "in however humble a way. Sometimes when I am painting I drop my brush"—she dropped it now—"and think that in many other fourth-floor flats, in many other poorly furnished studios, there are people like myself trying to express the beauty that is in them, and in Nature, by means of colour squeezed out of little tubes! And all over the world there are artists—men and women of letters, sculptors, musicians, painters, poets, and all who follow Art, in its manifold phases, trying to teach the world how to lead the Life Beautiful, and devoting themselves to this eternal idea. Of course the world scoffs. It has always scoffed. And it does not understand—it has never understood. But, never mind, the disciples toil onward, enduring all things and suffering all things, and despairing at their own failures and rewarded only by the joy of their own achievements. We belong to one great



family, we who live the Life Beautiful. Although we do not know each other, although we live alone, perhaps, in the household of those who do not understand, we feel, each one of us, in touch with all other souls of our own spiritual kindred, and stimulated and encouraged, and strengthened by the mysterious and mystic influence, of the great Ideal."

Patsy had spoken the words with an almost religious solemnity, and her eyes were luminous when she put her chin down on her folded hands, which clasped the easel, as she stood by her canvas in her brown holland overall, tied with pink bows. Smiling rather wistfully at John she said:

"Forgive me for telling you these things! But you do not scoff. You also seek the Unattainable Beauty."

John let a little coil of smoke float upwards in a spiral. "It is very good of you," he said. "I like to hear you talk like that. But I'm just afraid I'm one of those who do not understand. You have no idea what a duffer I am."

"Oh no," said Patsy eagerly. "You are so wise, and so silent, and so strong!"

"Don't you think we might get on with the work?" said John gently. "I am afraid I am giving you more sittings than I bargained for."

John began to think, indeed, that the portrait would never be finished, as he watched the progress of it, interrupted by philosophical conversations, and saw how slowly there was being evolved on the canvas a face which he recognised dimly, and as through a glass darkly, as his own, but which stared back at him with an expression utterly disconcerting and embarrassing.

"Am I really like that?" he said two or three times; and Patsy answered humbly:

"I hope so. I think I have caught something of your soul."

"Well, God help me, if I look like that!" thought John, but he did not put the thought into words.

At last the day came—the eve of "sending-in" day—when Patsy declared it was finished, yet even in making the declaration, added a touch here and a touch there, and then for the ten thousandth time stepped back with her hands folded, and her eyes half-closed, to gaze with tremulous anxiety at her work.

"Oh," she said, "this *must* get into the Academy. I

have painted it with prayerfulness, and I think, I really think, it is worthy of reward."

John said he thought it was *À la copperbottom*, and Winifred, who had stared at it so often that she had no more idea whether it was like John or a Cheshire cat, said it was not so dusty, and if the Academy were not the set of fools she took them to be, they would certainly hang it on the line.

Bernadine Brett was rather silent and did not venture upon an opinion, being, as she remarked rather sadly, "only a journalist," but she took Patsy's hand and squeezed it, and said:

"My dear, I hope it will get in. You have worked so hard at it. You deserve to win."

Patsy, out of her savings, had bought a big gold frame, which was brought upstairs in a huge packing-case by four men, trundled through the small hall (chipping off corners of the plaster) and dumped down in the drawing-room. There it was unpacked by John, down on his hands and knees, and the flat was littered with straw and paper, which mocked at the dustpan and broom in Bernadine's hands. But it was a joyful thing to Patsy when this great and glorious piece of furniture was revealed in its glittering gold under the gaslight, and when John hoisted it on the easel and framed the canvas with it.

John and the three girls then stepped back to gaze at the complete and finished effect, and it was surprising how the frame improved the portrait.

"It looks like an old master!" said Winifred, and Bernadine said it was a frame worthy of a picture by Sargent.

They had a little dinner-party on the strength of this event, to which Madge and Mrs. Fraquet came. Everything went very merrily—especially Bernadine's special surprise of "Royal Academy" pudding—until, without any apparent reason, Patsy burst into tears and left the room hurriedly.

Winifred laid down her knife and fork. "Bless the child! What's the matter now?"

"I expect she has been working too hard," said Bernadine. "I had better go and look after her."

"It is the reaction," said Mrs. Fraquet. "I know what it is to have finished a big piece of work. Raymond's nerves are always jagged when he writes 'Curtain' at the end of the Third Act. Let me go to Patsy. She just wants a little soothing."



But it was John who went "to render first aid in a professional capacity," as he remarked.

He found Patsy sitting on the edge of her bed mopping her eyes with a lace handkerchief which was all soppy with tears.

She laughed rather hysterically when John came in, saying :

"Hulloh, old girl, what's the matter?"

"I am sorry I made such an idiot of myself," said Patsy, blowing her nose violently.

Then suddenly she put her hands on John's shoulders and put her forehead down on his chest, and said :

"Oh, John, the picture has meant such a lot to me—so many joyful hours! And now it is going—and I shan't have you to myself any more." She burst into tears again and sobbed in quite a heart-broken way.

"Good Lord!" said John. "We are still neighbours, Patsy, and good friends. We shall see quite enough of each other."

"It will never be the same again. And you have been so kind and patient and good—and it's a vile daub of a picture!"

John said it was the finest picture ever painted, and the living image of his ridiculous face, and of his still more ridiculous soul.

This made Patsy laugh, and she dried her eyes. But before they went back to the others she put her face up to John, and said in a whisper :

"Give me a kiss—just for good luck!"

"Why not?" said John, and he put his face down to give her a sisterly kiss on the forehead. But she clasped his head in her hands and pulled it down a little and kissed him on the lips.

She went very white then, for a moment, and a moment afterwards a wave of crimson swept into her face, and her long brown lashes drooped upon her cheeks.

"It was only for luck," she said. "Only for luck, John!"

But John was rather silent for the rest of the evening. He had been startled by that passionate, burning kiss upon his lips.

There had been several times lately when John had been startled by a sense of mystery and by curious hints of danger underlying the apparent peacefulness and pleasantness of

his life in this street of mansions. He could not explain this to himself. He only knew that there were moments when his nature seemed to warn him of impending peril. He thought it might have something to do with his sister Madge. Things were not quite right with her. She was very restless, and irritable, and emotional. She went out too often to social gatherings, and came home too late at night. She had abandoned her novel, even, under stress of her social engagements, and when she stayed at home she would stay for an hour or more, quite motionless, staring into the fire, or with a book on her lap, without turning the pages, in a deep reverie. No, he could not quite make out what was the matter with Madge.

He asked Mrs. Fraquet about her, and that was one of the times when he had been startled by a hint of mysterious things at work beneath the smiling surface of everyday life.

Mrs. Fraquet had been strangely disconcerted by his question. She blushed uneasily, and then rose from her chair and walked towards the mantelpiece to arrange some flowers in a vase.

"I hardly know what to say about your sister," she said. "I do not quite understand her. I feel that she rather shuns me, for some reason."

"Shuns you?" said John, quite astonished.

"Hardly that, perhaps," said Phillida Fraquet. "But we are not such good friends with each other as I wished to be. There seems to be a little constraint between us."

She was still arranging the flowers on the mantelpiece, and had her back turned to John.

"Raymond sees a good deal of her," she said. "You know that they meet a good deal at different places, of course?"

"Yes," said John. "Your husband sends her a good many tickets for lectures and theatres and things. I am not sure that it is quite good for her to go out so much. It is too exciting."

"Yes," said Mrs. Fraquet, plucking a leaf from the stem of a daffodil, and looking at the golden bell with her head a little on one side. "I am not sure that it is quite good. But we must wait and see how things turn out. It is no use getting into a panic, is it?"

She spoke the last words rather softly, as though to herself, but John wondered what the words meant. Panic



was rather a strong word to use. He was only a little anxious about Madge's health. There was no earthly reason for "panic" about anything. He was silent, and dropped the subject, but he was left with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

John saw a good deal of Mrs. Fraquet at this time, and had established what he admitted to be a very delightful friendship with her. It was not quite similar to his friendliness with the three girls upstairs. That was a brotherly kind of comradeship—though he remembered with misgiving Patsy's passionate kiss—and with Phillida Fraquet he was less at his ease, more deferential even, and just a little afraid of himself, and of her. In her presence he sometimes felt rather clownish—a yokel from the country with gauche manners. This was not due to any assumption of superiority on her part. She had, indeed, a perfect simplicity; but she was what the French mean by *une femme gracieuse*, with an elegance of movement, of gesture, and of manner which in the old days, when the word "lady" was more exclusive, denoted gentle birth and upbringing.

In Phillida Fraquet's case this was not obviously due to aristocracy of blood, for she was the daughter of a Sussex farmer, but, however that might be, there was a kind of beautiful dignity in her character and ways which distinguished her among the women of John's acquaintance. Something of the old Galahad spirit seemed to stir in him when he was with her, or thought of her. He could imagine himself fighting any kind of dragon or evil knight to do her services or to gain her smile. At least, he thought so one day when turning over the pages of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," which Madge had left open on a chair, and then laughed aloud at himself and called himself a romantic ass for thinking such a thing.

The first opportunities of friendship had been brought about by the introductions to his old ladies in the back blocks. John, attending them professionally, had sometimes found Phillida there, in one or other of the small flats, and he stayed longer than he would have done to hear her chatting with little Miss Ringwood or old Mrs. Piggott, or whoever it might be, with a charming merriment which brought the tinkling laughter of old age into rooms where such music had been rare before her coming. She made herself quite at home with those social derelicts, and it was a pretty thing to see her sometimes seated on the carpet



—often rather threadbare—with her head against the silk dress of an old lady, whose white, wrinkled hands touched the coils of her hair with a kind of wonderment that this treasure should be so near to her. John walked home with Phillida after some of these visits, and although the distance was not great between the back blocks and the mansions facing the park, it was long enough for little conversations which he remembered word by word.

"You do not look very strong," he said one day. "I think I ought to send you some tonic."

Phillida laughed at that. "I am quite strong. The only tonic I want is some kind of work to do. Give me an object in life."

"What do you want with an object?" said John. "Isn't it enough to live? Listen how the birds are singing in the park! They don't bother about an object."

"Oh yes," said Phillida. "They have to build their nests, and find their daily food, and bring up their little ones. I have no little ones to bring up."

"Yes; I suppose they would make a difference," said John

"All the difference," said Phillida Fraquet.

That was one conversation between the back blocks and the mansions facing the park, and to John it seemed to reveal something of the secrets hidden in Phillida's heart, and to give some interpretation of the indefinable air of wistfulness which made Mrs. Fraquet's eyes so haunting in his imagination. She was a childless woman, and he remembered Winifred's words about "what every woman wants." There were many little signs that this was the one great gap in Phillida's life, and that she hungered for the love of a child. Sometimes, when they were walking together, she would lay her hand on his sleeve and say, "Look! There is a fairy-like creature! How glorious to have a mite like that!" And once she stopped with a little cry by the side of a perambulator being wheeled out from one of the ground-floor flats by a trim little nursemaid. Inside sat a lordly fellow of three, with a crown of golden curls free for the wind's playfulness. He sat up with a straight back, and gazed out upon the world with sky-blue eyes as proud as a prince.

Phillida spoke to him, and he replied with a serious politeness which was almost superb, in spite of the baby words.



He asked to see the locket which hung from a thin gold chain round her neck, and when she handed it to him he gazed at it solemnly before putting it into his mouth.

Mrs. Fraquet spoke to the prim little nursemaid with almost trembling deference, and seemed strangely excited.

"Would you allow me to kiss him?" she said. "I should so much like to, if you don't mind."

"As long as you haven't been near no infectious children," said the nursemaid, who had been showing signs of haughty resentment at the interference, but now relented when she saw how the beauty of her small lord and master—who ruled her with an autocratic will—had made a slave also of this elegant lady.

"Alas!" said Mrs. Fraquet. "I know so few children. . . . Will you kiss me?" she said, with anxious humility to babe with the sky-blue eyes.

He looked at her gravely, and then held his face up, and Phillida, putting her arms about him, kissed him once, ever so lightly, on the cheek. When she raised her head again, John saw that her eyes had filled with tears, although a little smile trembled about her lips.

"What a happy woman his mother must be!" she said. "I envy her! Oh, I envy her!"

John fancied that there were other reasons why Mrs. Fraquet had that indefinable air of wistfulness, and why she complained sometimes of headaches. It seemed to him that for some reason or other, apart from childlessness, her marriage with Raymond Fraquet had not been quite successful. Never once did she speak an unkind word about him, but by other words she hinted at unhappiness. One day, when he was in her flat—he had called round with the tonic which she had so laughingly refused—she spoke of her early life, and of the difference that marriage had made to her. She had been playing the piano when he came in, and he had stood at the doorway for a moment, listening to the dreamy notes and watching her as she sat before the instrument with the candlelight putting a glamour upon her face and hair.

She turned when she heard a slight sound he made, and for a moment seemed startled and embarrassed by the thought that he had been listening and watching while she played, believing herself alone. But in a moment she was smiling and gay, and drew out a chair for him by the fire, and sat on



the music-stool, with her face turned sideways to him, touching now and then strange little plaintive chords, very softly. The room was only lighted by the candles on the piano and by the flickering firelight. The curtains were not drawn, and outside, looking across the park from the high windows, the twinkling lights and riverside lamps and the rose-pink glow above the world of houses beyond, shone through the darkness. Down in the street, a quarter of a mile away, a piano-organ was playing with an endless stream of metallic melody, dimly heard from the distance. The klip-klop of horses' hoofs, the tinkle of cab-bells, the tooting of motor-horns, shrill blasts of cab-whistles from the neighbouring balconies, the deep note of a siren on a river tug, a coster's voice—Bert Uggins', perhaps—shouting out "Fine ferns an' bloomin' flahrs," rose up in a melody of discords, all vague and blurred to the fourth-storey windows of the block of mansions, but hardly penetrating the silence of this little drawing-room.

"Go on playing," said John. "It is jolly to hear you."

"Jolly," said Phillida, smiling. "Surely not? All the tunes I play seem doleful now. I seem to put melancholy into the gayest jig tune; but not deliberately." She twisted round on the stool and dog's-eared a sheet of music which she had taken from the piano. "I think the gayest tunes are the saddest."

"How's that?" said John.

"Oh, I don't know. They remind me of the days when I played them light-heartedly. I was in the old farmhouse, then, with a cheery father and a pack of noisy brothers and sisters, always laughing and quarrelling. They were good days, with plenty of work to do in the house and the garden. The garden was my little paradise. No one could plant a flower or pluck a weed without my gracious permission. It's funny to think of myself then—just a simple, stupid girl, but 'very musical,' as the neighbours used to say. We were all simple folk, and used to go to church on Sunday—the dear old village church—and I used to sing in the choir, and feel frightfully good. I believe I was rather good."

"Then Raymond came to write a play in a country cottage of ours. I fell in love with him at once, of course, and we used to go wandering in the fields and picking flowers, and he told me of London and of all its wonderful life, and it seemed to me that it would be like heaven to live there with



him. Then we married—it was a pretty country marriage, with bridesmaids in pink muslin, and a young farmer, who had loved me very much, as best man—poor fellow! We came to live in London, and I was very happy in our first rooms at Clapham Common. Of course, we were frightfully poor, but that didn't seem to matter.

“After the first year I used to pine rather for the old farmhouse and the noisy brothers and sisters. Things began to worry me a good deal—the ups and downs of Raymond's success and failure, the state of his nerves, and all that. Then, too, I was very stupid, and did not understand things. He was so clever, and all his friends were so clever, and their ideas were so strange. They frightened me, those ideas. Raymond and his literary friends criticised everything I had believed to be absolute truth—God and Christianity, and old-fashioned morality—my schoolgirl, country creed. Every thing was turned topsy-turvy in my brain when I listened to that talk. So I gave up going to church and saying my prayers and reading Dickens—how Raymond hated the sentimentality of Dickens!—and playing Schubert and Mendelssohn and my school pieces. Raymond tried to educate me and to put his ideas into my head, and to give me the latest points of view on religion and ethics and literature and art and music. But it was not a success! I have no intellect, and my nature is essentially old-fashioned. I am still what Raymond calls an ‘Early Victorian.’ Of course, an Early Victorian is out of place in Intellectual Mansions, as Winifred Vernon calls this street. So that is why the old tunes make me rather melancholy. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” said John.

He understood so well that he was horribly sorry for Raymond Fraquet's wife.

She seemed to think that she had let him understand too much, for she laughed in a curious way, and turned up the electric light, and said:

“What nonsense I have been talking while the candles burned dim!”

She went to the window, putting her hands up on each side of the curtain, and staring out into the darkness.

“All the little birds are asleep,” she said, “and, thank Heaven, the organ has gone into another street. It will be a fine day to-morrow, I think, and I shall hear the birds singing long before I get out of bed.”

Then Raymond came in. He stood at the doorway in his evening-clothes, with his hands in his pockets.

"Hulloh," he said. "Keeping each other company?"

"Yes," said Phillida. "Dr. John has been talking to me. He is very patient with a dull person like me. Where have you been to, Raymond?"

"Oh, a rotten reception at Lady Bampton's. She is ambitious to run a salon! There were a lot of literary hangers-on there, and that ass Horace Worsfold, who ought to be shot for that last play of his." He turned to John and said carelessly, "By the way, your sister was there."

"Oh yes," said John. "She told me that Lady Bampton had invited her, mentioning your name."

"Is that so?" said Fraquet.

"Did you bring her home, Raymond?" said Mrs. Fraquet.

"Yes; we were both going the same way. I am sorry you were not there, Phillida. It was rather amusing—a queer set of people."

Mrs. Fraquet did not answer. She had suddenly become rather thoughtful, and then John saw her glance over to her husband with a curious look, in which there was something like anxiety, even something like fear. John wondered what was the meaning of that look when he took his leave a few minutes later, and walked home to his own flat to find that Madge had already gone to bed.



## CHAPTER XII

RAYMOND FRAQUET was annoyed with the world, with his wife, and with himself, and was altogether in an uncomfortable state of mind. He had always had a grudge against the world, at least always since he had courted its favour. It did not understand him, and, worse still, did not trouble about him. It had often made him bitter to think how the world goes on its blind stupid way regardless of men of letters, who try to make it a little less blind and a little less stupid. Sometimes when he had finished a play, after prolonged agony and sweat of brow, and had written that last magic word, "Curtain," he had thrown down his pen, and (leaning forward with his elbows on the table and his hands thrust through his hair) had said:

"My God, here is something that has come burning out of my heart and brain! Here is a work which must startle public opinion, and alter national life, and mark a new era in those ideas which guide the destiny of a nation, and change the fabric of social life. I believe that ideas are more powerful than action, and that writers and poets and artists are the true leaders and teachers of life, irresistible in their influence. Here is a message for them, and they *must* listen to it, damn them! This play of mine is a challenge and cannot be ignored."

It was not altogether ignored. It was put on at The Court, perhaps, and criticised in the next day's papers, and in the weeklies which followed, and the play ran for three, four, eight, even twelve weeks, and then was quietly withdrawn, to make room for a success, or a failure, by some other dramatist. That was all. No social revolution happened. The procedure of the Divorce Court was exactly the same. Men still ran away with other men's wives, and repented of their folly. Young fools still married nice stupid girls and had fat stupid babies, and paid a stiff price for the

privilege, though miserably poor. There was still sweated labour in the slums, and the lucky rich still wantoned in luxury. The middle classes went to church on Sunday as usual, and cheated and schemed on weekdays. Women's hearts were still broken, and men degraded by their women. Hypocrisy was still rampant. Vulgarity was still all-pervading. Idealism was still scoffed at by the great mob.

And Raymond Fraquet was still poor, and, as a rule, horribly in debt. He did not want to get bitter. He knew that was a weakness, and bad for his work. But how could he help this creeping cynicism when he read the daily papers which, in spite of, and because of, their lies, are the mirrors of life? This wretched journalistic trash, this frightful journalistic English—written by men in railway trains, at the fag end of a public meeting, in the hurry and scurry of getting news—was more powerful in its influence on thought than his carefully-prepared epigrams, his polished phrases, his soul's philosophy. . . .

His teaching, his leadership, were thrust on one side, ignored (except in the columns of criticism by those same men who wrote bad English in a hurry), and the people obtained their ideas and their cheap philosophy from politicians and after-dinner speakers. Those wretched little politicians mouthing their party lies, speaking glibly on subjects of which they know nothing, uttering the same stale old *clichés* of thought, the same stupid old platitudes, were the leaders of England! And while men like Raymond Fraquet, sitting in quiet rooms, inspired by idealism, grappling big problems, dealing with universals, were powerless to open the eyes of the blind, and to make the deaf hear, the great crowd, the People, panted over each sensation of the day, grew furiously excited over such trivial subjects as Free Trade and Protection, the House of Lords versus the House of Commons, Land Taxation, or Unearned Increment, and applauded or denounced (according to the papers they read) the wisdom, or folly, of the little politicians, and fuddled their brains with thousands of small facts which do not matter in the sum of life.

So Raymond was annoyed with the world.

Lately he had been annoyed with his wife, and with himself.

He could not make out what had come over Phillida during recent months. He was almost face to face with



the belief that she no longer loved him, and he asked himself, "Why? Why?" He asked that question one morning in his study as he sat at his desk smoking a cigarette and drawing criss-cross pattern on his blotting pad. It unravelled a long chain of thought, until he woke out of his gloomy reverie with a sharp exclamation of pain to find that the cigarette had burnt down to his fingers. Then he paced up and down the room, with noiseless feet on a thread-bare carpet, all ink-stained. Once or twice he pushed back the hair from his high, thin forehead, with a gesture that had become a habit with him. Once he stopped to put a picture straight—a Burne-Jones print, which had become tilted at an angle and irritated his fastidious eye—once he stood in front of the mantel-piece and looked at his face in an oval gilt-framed mirror, staring at his grave eyes, at the thin, handsome, clean-shaven, clear-cut face which was his own.

But all the time his thoughts were going back over his married life, since the day, twelve years ago, when he had brought Phillida home to the poorly furnished rooms at Clapham Common. They had been happy then, happy in spite of poverty. Phillida's beauty had been the envy of all his friends, and her gaiety and simplicity had made their life in lodgings very pleasant. What ambitions he had had, and what dreams! He was not bitter with the world then, and believed that he had fame and fortune within easy reach. His laurels could crown Phillida's beautiful coils, and he would give her all that the heart of woman might desire. That had been his promise to her, and to fulfil that promise he had worked hard, always writing articles and essays in those days—late into the night and long after she had gone to bed. That had been rather hard on her. With her arm round his neck she had complained that he gave her little of his company and was too absorbed in his work. He remembered he had been a little fretful with her then, rather irritable because she could not understand that wit was a hard task-mistress.

He remembered unloosing her arms once, and saying, "We can't always be children, Phillida; you really must leave me to go on with my work." She had left him, and for a few moments he had stared at the blank paper before him, wondering whether after all he had done well in marrying so young, and whether his career would not be jeopardised by the duties and distractions of married life. The years had



slipped away quietly, and Phillida had learnt not to complain because he was still writing, still absorbed with his own thoughts and spending many hours of each day alone in his study where he allowed no interruptions. He had forced his way to the front, in spite of ceaseless disappointments. Gradually, as each year passed, his name was better known. Critics looked out for his work, to praise or condemn. From articles and essays he had gone on to drama, and although he did not make it pay, he was acknowledged as one of the foremost men of the new school.

All this time Phillida had been his companion, and his love for her had never changed. He could honestly say that. But he had to acknowledge to himself, sometimes moodily and always regretfully, that she had not been a help to him in his literary career. She had no literary instincts, and could not understand the paramount importance of literature and all forms of art in relation to life. She was still, and only, the well-brought up country girl with conventional old-fashioned ideas. She thought Tennyson the greatest of poets, and George Eliot the greatest of novelists. Nothing that he could say would shatter those convictions! It had hurt him frightfully at first, to find how little interest she took in his own work, and how little sympathy she had with his ideas. She had been his hardest critic, and the critic on the hearth is always rather damaging to a man's self-esteem and enthusiasm. She had judged all his idealism—his social philosophy, and his dreams, by the foot-rule standard of common sense—as though idealism had anything whatever to do with common sense!

Then, too, she had been shocked by many of his themes, and by his frank inquiry into the great problems of life. A freethinker and a humanist, taking the heart of man as he found it, and always eager to cast off the cruel old shackles of cast-iron morality, he could not shape his stories and plays to avoid hurting the susceptibilities of a wife who used to sing in the choir of a village church, and still had a lingering belief in the Deity as a venerable old gentleman with a big white beard and side whiskers. And yet he hated to hurt her. In a weak way, which he tried to overcome, he always felt a prick of conscience when he put some audacity in the mouth of one of his characters and wrote an epigram with a sting in it for orthodox souls. He knew his wife would wince at the words, and that her eyes would be reproachful,



and that after the rehearsal, or the reading, she would put her hands on his shoulder and say:

"Raymond, do be careful! Don't be so cynical and scoffing. Think how you may damage some young girl, or some boy just entering into manhood. It is easy enough already—God knows—to fall into temptation. But you try to make it easier still by saying there is no harm in sin. It is not right of you, Raymond."

To such words as these he would answer laughingly—"My dear Phillida, I am no Tempter. I am not a bit cut out for the part of Mephistopheles. But you must allow me to believe that what is often called sin, in ecclesiastical tyranny and superstition, is the highest fulfilments of God's will—the Divine satisfaction in the good laws of Nature."

He remembered a conversation when he had used those very words, and Phillida had flashed a retort at him which had made him really angry.

"It is so absurd of you to talk like that, and so utterly insincere! Anybody would think you were a man of immoral life and instincts, whereas you are as respectable as any of the suburban people you jeer at so much. My dear Raymond, you have neither the physique nor the temperament for a loose life. Why not be true to your own nature?"

He had been startled by those words. It had revealed to him rather painfully that Phillida, his wife, had been studying him with a penetration for which he had not given her credit. No man likes to have his most hidden secret laid bare.

Lately Phillida had fallen into the habit of saying things which stung him to the quick. He had to confess to himself that he was rather afraid of her steady unswerving eyes when he said some flippant cynical thing, and that her sense of truth was so keen that he was almost nervous of talking in her presence to any of his friends—especially to his women friends—because by a word or two she would prick some little conceit upon which he had ventured, convict him of apparent insincerity or vanity, and make him look very foolish, and feel very annoyed. She made him feel that she had found him out—a most unpleasant feeling for any husband.

Why should he feel that? He had nothing to conceal. It was true that, like all literary men, he desired praise, and hated criticism, but that was not vanity. And it was true



that he was eager for sympathy, and flattered by the women who gave it to him so generously. But that was Phillidas' fault, partly. It was owing to her lack of sympathy that he sought it elsewhere. She never went about with him now. She hated the theatre, and intellectual society. She had not even troubled to go to his last "First Night"! It was no wonder that he went out a good deal alone, and made friends of people whom Phillida did not know or care to know. Besides, as a student of humanity and as a man with a temperament, it was necessary for him to get out into society, to move in the intellectual crowd, and to study life at first hand. He had got past the old days when he sat all day long in his study weaving the web of his own imagination.

But he was disturbed by Phillida's attitude towards him—frankly disturbed. What had come over her lately? She did not seem to care very much what he did. She took less interest than ever in his work, and she was more self-assertive, more independent, and seemed bent upon finding some new scheme of life for herself, apart from him. Once or twice lately he had tried to win back her old tenderness, her girlish simplicity of affection, but he had failed miserably and unaccountably. She had suffered his caresses coldly, had slipped away from his arms, with a curious look in her eyes. She would not even trouble to ask him where he was going if he put on evening-clothes, and said, "I shall not be in this evening, dear," or where he had been when he came back late.

Raymond, pacing up and down his study, thought of all these things, and then, coming to a standstill, looked at himself in the glass again, and said:

"My God, what should I do without her love? Is this going to be a tragedy?"

A few evenings after he had asked these questions and left them unanswered he was alone with his wife. She was playing, and when her hands rested on the keys silently for a few minutes, while he watched her with a curious feeling of admiration and irritability, he said:

"Phillida, come over and talk to me."

She turned over the leaves of her music book. "Talk to you?" she said. "What shall we talk about?"

"Ourselves," said Raymond.

"Oh, a dull subject!" said Phillida, and she swept her fingers over the notes ever so lightly in a running melody.



"Don't play any more beastly music!" said Raymond nervously. "Let us have a cosy chat."

Phillida stopped playing and turned round on the music-stool.

"You mean to say you are in an emotional mood to-night. You want to worry over our differences in temperament. Don't you think you had better go on reading, Raymond, and let me go on playing?"

Raymond flushed a little. "I don't see why you should call me emotional because I want to have a talk with you. I can't understand you, Phillida—frankly, I can't."

"No?" said Phillida. "Why not?"

"You have been so strange lately. I sometimes think——"

"Yes?"

"I sometimes think you have lost your love for me. Good God, my dear, don't let me believe that! It would be too horrible!"

"And yet you say you are not emotional to-night!" said Phillida, smiling. "Don't talk nonsense, Raymond."

"It is not nonsense," he said, with a little catch in his throat. "You have been frightfully cold and sarcastic lately. And you have adopted an extraordinary spirit of—of independence."

"In what way?"

"In many ways," said Raymond. "I do not object to your bringing people into this flat without consulting me at all—I mean those old women of yours—but I do strongly object——"

"Yes? To what?"

"Well, I think I have a right to object to your taking up with a political organisation of which I utterly and absolutely disapprove; to your spending time with women whom I regard as the pests of society and most undesirable acquaintances for my wife, and to your reading the literature and hearing the lectures, and all that, of a movement which is all very well in theory, but damnably dangerous in practice."

Raymond had allowed himself to become excited. He spoke quickly, and with heat, and there was an angry light in his eyes.

"Do not use such long phrases," said Mrs. Fraquet quietly. "Do you mean Women's Suffrage? Is that what is worrying you?"

"Yes," said Raymond. "I do mean that. I think that, at least, you might talk things over with me. I am not altogether ignorant of social questions. But you say nothing. I only learnt by accident that you had got entangled with this silly business."

"Somebody has been telling you falsehoods," said Phillida. "I am not entangled. I am only interested. It seems to me very extraordinary that women should be ready to face such perils and to suffer such indignities, and to brave such ridicule for the sake of an ideal—any ideal. There must be something in it. It occurred to me one day that there must be a great deal in it. Some wonderful promise for women, for which they are ready to do any desperate thing, and even to die. So I have been studying the question, quite quietly, and without any prejudices either way. It was Winifred Vernon who introduced me to some of the leaders, and I find them rather merry, high-spirited women, with a sense of humour, and splendid courage. Of course, some of them are rather bitter and soured, poor things! but not many—not as a rule, I find. Have you any objection to my meeting these people?"

"It's dangerous," said Fraquet, "and you might have told me."

"Why dangerous?" said Phillida, ignoring the second part of his sentence.

"I should hate you to become one of these militant creatures," said Raymond. "It would not suit your character, Phillida, and, besides, it would damage my own reputation. I do not want to be made a laughing-stock among my friends."

"Oh, I see," said Phillida. "You are afraid for your own sake?"

"For yours as well as for my own," said Raymond. He returned again to his chief cause of complaint. "Anyhow, you might have told me."

Phillida looked at him with a very straight, searching glance, and his eyes shifted uneasily.

"You do not tell me everything, Raymond. You make many friends whom I do not know."

"They could be yours as well as mine," said Raymond. "But you hate society."

"Oh, I do not complain," said Mrs. Fraquet. "But I think it is time we both learnt to lead our own lives in



our own way. I have grown tired of having no life of my own, no object to live for."

"You used to be content to live for me," said Raymond, rather bitterly. "Are you tired of that?"

Phillida was thoughtful for a moment or two. Then she said:

"I think I am. It is a rather one-sided arrangement, and the world, I find, does not centre round one man, even though he writes plays and is my husband."

Raymond rose from his chair, and stood with his hands in his side pockets, looking down at the floor.

"It is as I thought," he said. "You do not love me any more."

Phillida was impatient with him. "Hush!" she said. "Hush! You know that I love you as I have always loved you. Will you force me to say what I should be sorry to say?"

Raymond raised his head, and a slight colour crept into his face.

"What is that?"

"Are you quite sure of *yourself*, Raymond? Are you sure that you are not going too far with the doctor's sister—Madge le Dreux?"

Raymond laughed, rather uneasily. "Good Lord, you are not jealous, are you?"

"No, I am not jealous," said Phillida quietly. "But I am just a little afraid; more for her than for you—much more for her than for myself. I should be sorry if that child scorched her wings."

Raymond laughed again, with a scornful, rather shrill, sound.

"What an idea! What old maid's gossip have you been hearing?"

"I am not blind, nor deaf," said Phillida. "I can see that Madge's eyes have a strange excited look when you are near her, and I know that your voice has a strange tenderness when you speak to her. And I have seen glances exchanged between you which tell of a secret understanding, and a more than usual intimacy. It was the doctor who told me that you are with her more than I knew or guessed."

"So that is your informant?" said Raymond angrily. "That fellow has been playing the spy on his sister has he? If he says a word to me about his vile suspicions, I will knock him down."

Phillida looked at the little slight, frail figure of her husband and smiled.

"I am afraid you two would be unevenly matched," she said. "You may be more clever, Raymond, but he has all the physique!"

For some reason the words touched one of her husband's quivering nerves. He went white with anger.

"You taunt me——!" he said fiercely.

Phillida put up her hand. "Hush! We will not have a wrangle. I don't taunt you at all. I only tell the truth and ask for the truth." She went across to him and took his hand. "Raymond," she said, "you can trust me always. I love you just as much as in the early days. But you must see that we have both grown older, and that things have changed. I am no longer a girl. I am a lonely woman, childless—childless, Raymond!—and I want some purpose in life beyond the little duties of the flat. You must not treat me as a child any more. But if I love you I must be sure of you, Raymond. If you trust me, I want to trust you also. And sometimes, lately, I have been filled with strange fears."

"What fears?" said Raymond. "Speak plainly, and let me know the worst you think about me."

"I sometimes think you may be tempted to put your theories about life—and love—into actual practice. In that case——"

"In that case?" asked Raymond; and he laughed lightly, but not quite easily.

"In that case you would break my heart and ruin three lives," said Phillida quietly; and she added, as though to herself, "I pray it may not be so."

Raymond had released his hand from her clasp, and was now pacing up and down the room with a quick, nervous step.

"My dear girl," he said, "my dear child, put such preposterous thoughts out of your head! I cannot think where you got them from. I swear to you, on my soul of honour, that I love you, and you alone, in all the world."

So the husband and wife kissed each other. But that night, alone in his study, Raymond sat brooding for more than an hour after Phillida had gone to bed, and once he spoke aloud, and said:

"I wonder! I wonder how this is going to work out!"



The next morning he met Madge le Dreux in the fountain court of the Tate Gallery.

It was curious how gradually they had slipped into the habit of making daily appointments like this, and how the habit seemed necessary now to the nature of both of them. As a rule, the rendezvous was not made deliberately. With a "Good-night" under a lamp-post outside the mansions, Fraquet would say:

"By-the-by, I thought of looking into the British Museum"—or the Wallace Collection, or what not—"to-morrow morning for an hour or two. It might be rather amusing to you to join me in the Greek Room—if you have nothing better to do, of course."

And, without waiting for an answer, he would lift his hat and give her one of his delightful smiles, and go quickly into his flat. It nearly always happened that his suggestion seemed very good to Madge, and, the next morning, when she came to decide what she would do with her day—she had not made up her mind the night before—she would hurry away to the meeting-place, filled with anxiety lest Raymond had forgotten his own plan, or had been prevented from fulfilling it.

She generally arrived before he did, so anxious was she not to be late, and he would find her in a day-dream before an armless torso of Venus, or an Egyptian mummy-case, or a tray of Roman hair ornaments, and he would stand by her side, before she became aware of his presence, and say:

"Hulloh! I did not expect to find you here. A pleasant surprise!"

He was always pleasantly surprised that she should have adopted his hint like this, though it happened so often that he might have taken it for granted.

Madge would laugh, and say, "It was your idea!" and laugh again when he said:

"Was it? By Jove, yes; I had forgotten."

Then, after these preliminaries, they would wander round the rooms of the museum or the art-gallery, or whatever the place might be, and Raymond Fraquet would have a hundred interesting things to say to arouse her interest in the objects exhibited. She was astonished by his knowledge, and delighted by the glow and playfulness of his imagination. As a scientist builds up the whole form of a primeval beast from a small piece of bone, so Fraquet, by the suggestion of



a bit of pottery, a Roman ornament, a Greek coin, a broken statue, or some mouldering dust inside a painted coffin, would conjure up the humanity and romance of a past civilisation.

She would always remember his conversation in the new wing of South Kensington Museum, where they walked through many rooms filled with mediæval furniture, domestic utensils, costumes, arms, and handicrafts. To him, all these old inanimate things seemed to be haunted by the ghosts of history.

"Look here," he said, "at this case full of boots and shoes. The feet that used to wear those bits of leather have long gone to dust; but how they have left their characters behind! You see those long-toed shoes? They were worn by a young gallant at the Court of Richard II. Can you not see those shoes stealing softly through the snow, leaving a black smudge at every step, down the narrow wynds around the Tower, to an old house with overhanging eaves and bulging window-panes, where his mistress waited for him shivering with cold, but longing for his warm embrace? He would let himself in ever so softly through a little oak door with one of those big keys we saw a moment ago, and the girl would hear those long-toed shoes come flip-flopping up the narrow oak stairway. And there you see her own little shoes, as tiny as a child's, which he would stoop down and kiss, though she would try to hide them under her kirtle. And there you see the heavy jack boots of her father. You see how heavily he trod on his heels, what great, brawny legs he had! Oh, he was a stout and fierce old man, I warrant, and that right boot may have kicked the young gallant downstairs from the daughter's chamber much quicker than the youth crept up with his flipperty-flop. But I have no doubt love found out a way. And there you see the shoes of all the Cits who came to the wedding of Sir Piers Gladheart and Mistress Alice of Paul's Wynd. Can't you see all those people?—the women with their horned head-dresses, the old men in velvet gowns, the young bloods in parti-coloured hose—and all those shoes, so clumsy, and so dapper, and so dainty, click-clacking on the bare boards, up the middle, down the middle, in a good old English dance?"

So Raymond Fraquet went on weaving his fancies, and conjuring up the spirits of old things from the relics of past ages collected under glass cases; and his words put a spell of enchantment upon Madge le Dreux.



There were many evenings also when Madge enjoyed the intellectual conversation of Mr. Raymond Fraquet, dramatist. Then the appointment was fixed beforehand, and he called round, looking very handsome in his evening-clothes with a velvet collar and velvet buttons (little details of dress which always distinguished him from other men) to find Madge in a shimmery white dress which had been bought out of many small fees earned by Dr. John in the street of mansions and the slum alleys at the back of beyond. Together they went driving in one of the hansom from the rank, across the river to a theatre or concert-hall or to a house where intellectuals gathered; and to Madge there was always something romantic and adventurous and exciting in those journeys behind the tinkling music of the cab-bells through the purple twilight or the translucent darkness of summer evenings in London.

Raymond Fraquet was always so kind and polite, and paid her exquisite little compliments in a serious way without a touch of insincerity or gallantry, and, with her white frock billowing about her, she would sit as quiet as a mouse beside him with her bare arm touching the sleeve of his coat, so close were they together in the cab. Sometimes, in a brotherly way, he would put his hand on hers for a moment and say, "Are you feeling cold?" or, "Do you see that rosy feather in the sky?" or "How charming the lights look in the old houses along the Chelsea side of the river!" And sometimes if the horse shied, Madge, who was nervous, would put her hand on one of Fraquet's knees and say, "Do you think it is safe? There is something queer about that horse, Raymond." It was many weeks now since they had taken to calling each other by their Christian names.

At the theatre Fraquet's comments between the acts were always stimulating and enlightening and amusing to a girl who knew so little about the Drama, and although he was very critical and sometimes rather cruel in sarcasm about the work of his brother playwrights, Madge acknowledged to herself that he had a wonderful way of analysing the motives and construction of the play and revealing its weakness or stupidity.

At the houses where they went for weak coffee and literary conversation they were not often together during the evening. A little group of men and women—generally women—gathered round Raymond Fraquet, and Madge, giving only half-



attention to some novelist or essayist or woman-writer to whom she had been introduced, would listen to stray words reaching her ears from Raymond's group, and would watch his vivacity, and his familiar little gesture of thrusting back his hair, and his handsome clear-cut face illumined by the light of intellectual fire. The women listened to him with delight, and flashed glances at each other, as much as to say, "Isn't he wonderful!" "Isn't he altogether charming!" "How clever!" and Madge would smile (to the surprise perhaps of a man speaking to her seriously on the Poor Law, or the philosophy of Schopenhauer), knowing how satirical Raymond would be on the way home about those very women who were now giving him their flattery and homage.

Sometimes across the room the eyes of Raymond and Madge would meet with that look of secret understanding and intimate comradeship which had been noticed by Phillida Fraquet—and by others who are very quick to read the language of the eyes. Well, it was all very pleasant and exciting to a girl from the country, and the homeward ride, when they were together again in a hansom cab, and when Raymond wrapped her cloak about her, and when he chatted over the incidents of their evening's amusement with light-hearted gaiety, or, as sometimes happened, fell into silence, and sat staring out of the cab with thoughtful eyes, seemed to Madge a kind of dream-story from which she would awake, to find that it had all been unreal.

Yet when she was not under the spell of Raymond's personality she was rather worried; so worried by troubled thoughts that when she went to her room after leaving him outside the mansions with one of his casual suggestions for a meeting next day, she would slip off her frock, and lie no more undressed than that, upon her bed, with a half-stifled cry, and stay awake sometimes until the grey light of morning crept through the window-blinds. During those sleepless hours she would analyse her own emotions, and her relations with Raymond Fraquet, asking herself, doubtfully and fearfully, whether it was right that her happiness should depend so utterly upon him; whether she ought not to break this spell which he put upon her; whether the friendship, so innocent as it seemed, so delightful, so educating, might not lead to a great danger in which her very soul might be shipwrecked. Before she dropped asleep sometimes she would resolve with almost desperate determination to test her moral



strength and regain her free will by not going to meet him next day whatever place he might have named, and however pleasant the temptation.

But after breakfast (still remembering her resolution) and when John (dear old John whom she neglected so much now, and who looked at her so often with grave, anxious eyes) had gone to his dispensary in the Park Road, she would look at the clock, and see that it was getting near the hour when Raymond would be starting, and invisible strings would tug at her heart, until all her resistance was weakened, and she would run upstairs to put on her hat, with trembling hands, and go nervously out of the flat, and in her hurry take a cab, even, in order not to arrive too late for the rendezvous!

She was not a child, nor so simple as some people thought her. Indeed, she had a gift of straight thinking, and years of novel reading had taught her as much about certain phases of psychology in the relations of men and women as other girls had learnt by actual experience. Therefore she was not blind to the meaning of these emotions which possessed her, of this restlessness and indecision, and this craving for the society of Raymond Fraquet. She knew that she was in love with him, deeply and irretrievably. She was only in doubt as to whether it was right and safe for her to love him, and that filled her with a haunting and painful perplexity. For sometimes she would argue that it was not only right, but the best gift of God. It had given a new glory to the world and made a melody of her life, and filled her with a joyous delight that had been unknown to her before. There could be no harm in a love which did all this for her. And as for safety, what peril could there be? Raymond was a gentleman, and not by any word or look had he gone beyond the bounds of honourable friendship. He had given her the gift of his friendship, not knowing that in doing so he had awakened the passion of love in her whole being. He had never known that, and must never know it. So long as she kept her secret there would be safety.

And yet—there was another side to that argument which went on ceaselessly in her soul. She was strong-minded enough to know that she was weak, like all who are born of women. There might be some moment when she would not be strong enough to hide her secret, or be satisfied by Raymond's friendship. Supposing he were to go away—what would happen then? She would have to follow him wherever



he went. She could not end that friendship with a quiet "Good-bye." Besides, even now, what about Phillida? Serious stay-at-home Phillida, about whom Raymond spoke so tenderly, of whose beauty he was so proud, whose common sense, he said, seemed to cleave like a sword through his idealism—was it fair to *her*? Was it—to use John's phrase—was it *playing the game*? There were hours, especially when she was with Phillida, when Madge made up her mind very decidedly that it was *not* playing the game, and that she must not see so much of Raymond Fraquet without the knowledge of his wife.

It was with this conviction that she mustered up courage one day to speak to him on the subject.

They were sitting at the tea-tables in Kensington Gardens, "having a picnic," as Raymond described it. It was an afternoon in June, and the tables, spread with snow-white cloths on the green carpet of the grass, and shaded by the trees in full leaf, were the centre of a charming picture. Some of the young mothers of Kensington—pretty women dressed in light frocks with flower-laden hats—had brought their dainty children to this *al fresco* tea-party, and the manners and conversation and dress and beauty of the little ones seemed to provide quiet amusement and pleasure to Raymond, who, in a new silk hat slightly on one side, and with his best black coat and well-creased trousers and patent boots, and a silver-knobbed stick with which he prodded the turf, looked less like a literary man and more like a gentleman (Madge did not quite mean that when the phrase came into her thoughts!) than in the light suit and soft hat which he wore more often. Some schoolgirls were at the next table, eating a prodigious number of cakes, and at other tables were delightful girls who had left school some years ago, no doubt, and were now learning other lessons from bronzed, clean-shaven, grey-eyed young men, who sat on the other side of their little tea-tables.

Beyond, down avenues of tall old trees, and on the emerald grass, bathed in beautiful shadows, and spangled with gold where the sun glinted through the leaves, white-frocksed children and grey-frocksed nursemaids were sitting in little groups, playing with dolls, and reading books, and through the warm shimmering air of this summer afternoon floated the music of children's laughter, and the cooing of pigeons, and the drowsy hum of bees.



"Pleasant, isn't it?" said Raymond. "You would hardly think we were in the heart of London. But look at those schoolgirls, tucking into strawberries and cream. What appetites!"

Madge did not answer. She was looking at one of the other girls, who had left school, learning the lessons of life with one of the bronzed young men.

"Raymond," she said presently, "why don't you bring Phillida here?"

"Phillida?" said Raymond. "Oh, I used to. Lots of times in the old days, when we lived at Chelsea."

"Why not now? Bring her here to-morrow."

"Certainly," said Raymond. "If she will come."

"She will come if you ask her. Why should we be sitting here without her? Is it right, Raymond? Is it right?"

She asked the question with a little catch in her throat, and Raymond saw that something was troubling her. It was not difficult for him to guess the cause of her trouble. He had asked himself the same question many times, though not that afternoon.

But he answered the question now, carelessly, and with a laugh.

"Right? Of course it is; why not? It is very pleasant to be here."

"Yes," said Madge, "very pleasant." She took up a tea-spoon and twisted it about, so that the sun glinting on it made a little Jack o' lantern which flashed upon the cups.

"Sometimes things are so pleasant that one forgets other things—one's duty, for instance, and people who belong to one. I wish Phillida were with us. I should not feel so selfish."

"You selfish?" laughed Raymond. "My dear girl, you are the soul of unselfishness. Don't worry about Phillida. She is listening probably at some meeting to women demanding liberty and denouncing men."

"I do worry about her," said Madge. She went rather pale, but put up a sunshade, although she was under the shadow of the trees. "I am worrying a good deal," she said.

Raymond called up a waiter and paid the bill, and then said:

"Let us stroll about a little."

They went under the trees, past the little groups of nurse-maids and children.

"What are you worrying about, little woman?" he said presently, as though he had been thinking about her question.

Madge laid her hand on his arm. "Raymond, don't think me foolish—but I sometimes feel—I feel this afternoon—that this—this friendship of ours cannot go on like this. It has been a beautiful thing to me, and I shall never forget all your—your kindness; but I must not see you so often. I must not take Phillida's place. I cannot explain things very well. I put things too crudely. But you understand what I mean? You understand me, Raymond?"

She spoke almost pleadingly, as though urging him to understand, and not force her to put things more clearly.

Raymond was silent for a few moments. "Has Phillida been speaking to you?" he said; and Madge answered:

"No! No!" very quickly, as though eager that he should not have that idea for a single moment.

"Why should we not be friends?" said Raymond. "Have I ever said an unkind or disloyal word about Phillida? Have I ever said a word to you which I should not like my wife to hear?"

A deep colour swept into Madge's face. "You have been all that is good, Raymond," she said in a low voice.

"Well, then," he answered, "what is our trouble? Surely Phillida has no right to begrudge this friendship? It has been so innocent and charming. My dear girl, it would make me very sad indeed if anything happened to put a stop to this—this delightful intimacy of ours, to these moments of quiet comradeship between the working hours of life. God knows I am a moody man, with a strong strain of melancholy in my nature, but my mood is always bright when I am with you, Madge. You draw out the best that is in me, if I may say so."

"I wish I could be sure that it is all quite—safe!" said Madge.

They were standing now by the Round Pond where small boys were sailing big yachts, and she shaded the sunlight from her eyes with a little parasol of lace, and looked away to the old red palace where Dutch William still stands, in stone, between the flower-beds.

"Safe?" said Raymond; and he laughed softly. "Safe? We are neither of us very dangerous!"

Madge laughed at that, and no more was said on the



subject. But that evening when they left each other outside the red letter-box in the street of mansions, Raymond took Madge's hands and held them rather tightly, and said:

"Madge, trust me—trust me, and do not be afraid."

Then he turned and walked away quickly into the entrance way of his own block of mansions, and Madge, with a fluttering heart went into her own little flat, and seemed rather white and out of breath when John met her in the hall, and said:

"Hulloh, Madge, I am glad you are back! I have made some toast for you, and it is getting hard and cold."

## CHAPTER XIII

MADGE'S conversation in Kensington Gardens with Raymond Fraquet was not without influence upon the mind of that brilliant and unsuccessful playwright. Light-heartedly as he had answered her questions, and defended the intimacy of their friendship, her words had given a twinge to his conscience, and reawakened those doubts, as to the new position between himself and Phillida, which had disturbed him in his study. He admitted to himself that perhaps he had been going a little too far with Madge le Dreux, pleasant though the path had been. He was immensely attracted by her. This girl with the wondering eyes to whom everything in London was unfamiliar, who showed an insatiable curiosity to see things, and who had such a charming humility when he talked to her, was very *piquante* to him. She interested him more than most girls he had known, and drew him out of himself so that he was often surprised by his own vivacity and wit and gaiety in her presence—and felt the better for it. She raised him in his own estimation when in the loneliness of his study and in a morbid mood he had been tempted to despise his own personality and curse himself for a fool and a failure. He was grateful to little Madge for that!

In another way she attracted him and piqued him. He saw (and smiled sometimes when he saw) that he had a kind of mesmeric effect upon her. If he looked into her eyes she dropped her lashes quickly as though afraid of his gaze. Yet if he were in a room full of people and looked across to her from a distance almost immediately she would become conscious of his look, and their eyes would meet. He could see that he had put a kind of spell upon her, that a mere hint as to a meeting would bring her to the place, that she could not keep away from him. This was also rather pleasing. It is good for a man, thought Raymond Fraquet, to have



the admiration of a charming girl, to know that she finds him "fascinating" in the true sense of that old word.

His friendship with her had been very innocent and charming. Still it was well to be discreet. No man can be quite sure of himself in all times and places, and he would not like Phillida to have any right to complain. He would not like to think that he had been disloyal by a hair's breadth to Phillida. Perhaps he had been a little foolish, and also a little selfish in going about to so many places alone with Madge. Not only had it interfered seriously with his work—and his bank account was horribly low—but it had left Phillida alone at times when she might reasonably have expected his company.

Raymond Fraquet, having thought all this out quite clearly, and having blamed himself severely, and having had the consolation which always comes from self-condemnation (when it is more severe than the case deserves), decided to amend his ways.

Three times that week he invited Phillida to go out with him in the evening—to the theatre, to a reception at Mrs. Augustus Brown's, and to a lecture on the Decadence of the Drama by a dramatist whose latest play had been banned by the Censor. In each case Phillida excused herself from accepting the offer. That was a rebuff to his good intentions, and after the third failure with Phillida he decided to fall back upon Madge. To his annoyance she also had a previous engagement, and Raymond spent a miserable and angry two hours listening to a denunciation of modern drama in which two of his own plays were alluded to, in a cowardly and covert way, as samples of all that is false in art and morally pernicious.

Upon the following evening, however, Phillida solicited the favour of his society, and by one of those psychological tricks with which the devil tempts a man, Raymond was not at all inclined to confer that favour, although previously he had been scheming to get his wife to go out with him more often.

"You surely do not want me to go to supper with one of your old women?" he said, rather ungraciously. "You object to intellectual conversation, as you call it, but I should think it is better than old maids' gossip."

"My dear Raymond," said Phillida, "you jump at conclusions. I want you to take me to the King's Hall

meeting to hear the Prime Minister. I cannot very well go alone, otherwise I would not trouble you."

"The Prime Minister!" said Raymond, quite astonished. "You are not interested in party politics, are you? It's the lowest, dirtiest business in the world, and utterly below the intelligence of people who know something about art and literature and those things that matter."

"I do not know much about those things," said Phillida. "I have no literary taste, as you have acknowledged a hundred times, and I rather fancy politics *do* matter, and are going to matter a good deal just now. We can't fold our hands and shut our eyes while a great social struggle is beginning which may affect even our own lives, and certainly those of many people around us. Anyhow, I want to go to the meeting, Raymond. Do you object to take me? If so, I will ask Dr. le Dreux, who is also going, he tells me."

"I will take you, certainly, if you wish it," said Raymond Fraquet. "But, my dear girl, don't, for Heaven's sake, get interested in this absurd political strife, and those party lies and cries. We have nothing whatever to do with all that."

"Whom do you mean by we?" said Phillida.

"I mean the intellectuals, the people who believe that man does not live by bread alone."

"Man cannot live without bread," said Phillida; "and in some streets he finds it hard to get."

"That has been the degradation of art," said Fraquet bitterly, and without a direct answer to his wife. "Instead of keeping the sacred lamp alight in our own chamber and trying to see by its light the great truths of humanity, and the broad issues of life, we go about with farthing dips in the market-place spluttering grease upon our political opponents and discovering obvious old platitudes as if they were new revelations of Divine wisdom. Some of our distinguished literary men are Members of Parliament! No wonder literature is cheap to-day!"

"You have mixed your metaphors, haven't you?" said Phillida. "And I have not the slightest idea what you mean, anyhow. However, I am glad you will go with me, Raymond."

She thought over some of his words. "I am surprised you have spoken like that," she said. "You have dealt with social reform in several of your plays."



"I have dealt with the humanities," said Raymond, "and the relations between men and women. Modern politics are based on the science of arithmetic (and the sums generally work out wrong), the swing of the pendulum, and personal abuse. I am not interested in that sort of thing. Give me an ideal and I will follow it. But the leaders of to-day are destitute of ideas, to say nothing of ideals."

"All right," said Phillida. "And I confess I am not much interested in what the Prime Minister is going to say. I am going for another reason."

Raymond did not hear those last words. He was busy with his own thoughts, rather angry, irritable thoughts. Otherwise he might have been curious to know his wife's reason.

When Mr. and Mrs. Fraquet drove that evening to the King's Hall Raymond was in a happier frame of mind. It pleased him to be in a hansom cab with his wife, and he was touched by the thought that it was several months since they had been out together like this. He clasped her hand as it lay in her lap, and said:

"This is very pleasant, Phillida. We ought to do this kind of thing more often."

Phillida was silent, but returned the pressure of his hand.

"I think the meeting will be rather exciting," she said presently; and Raymond laughed, and said:

"Oh, hang the meeting! But I am glad to be with you. We will have a little supper afterwards at some restaurant."

They came into the swirling traffic of South Kensington and were held up in a block of carriages and cabs outside the King's Hall. Evidently the appearance of the Prime Minister on the platform had attracted great crowds, mainly of well-to-do people in evening-dress, among whom were many women. Raymond noticed a number of police drawn up outside the hall in a double file, and several mounted men sat motionless on their horses down a side street.

"The Prime Minister seems to need protection," said Raymond. "Anyone would think we were living in a state of revolution. What self-advertisers those fellows are!"

"Perhaps there will be some trouble to-night," said Phillida. She looked out of the cab rather anxiously.

In the outer corridors there was a crush of people making their way to the stalls and boxes and galleries. Stewards

were scrutinising their tickets with unusual care. The greetings of people who recognised friends from afar, the laughter of women pressing forward to the doors, the conversation of a great restless crowd, made a babel of noise. Raymond, with his wife's hand on his arm, followed the drift of the tide towards one block of the stalls, and with a rather flushed face forced his way to the seats corresponding to the numbers on his tickets.

"Here we are," he said. "Why, this is worse than a football scrimmage! You had better take off your cloak, Phillida. It will get pretty warm presently."

"Yes, I think it will, rather too warm," said Phillida, and, as she stood by her seat, letting her cloak fall into her husband's hands, and revealing her black silk dress cut low at the throat, and her beautiful arms, she gazed round the great hall, filling rapidly now with a vast audience from floor to ceiling. The lights were not yet turned up to their full power, and there was a vague and shadowy twilight beneath the dome, though here and there a woman's face and figure, a group of people in a box, a row of white faces looking down from the galleries, were brilliantly illumined by the lamps which shed their yellow rays into the surrounding gloominess.

Mr. and Mrs. Fraquet took their places, Phillida still staring up at the tiers of seats now all but filled, and Raymond drawing his trousers up a little to prevent their creasing at the knees, and tucking in his patent boots to save them from the feet of passers-by who pushed along their line of stalls. He overheard disconnected conversations, and stray words—meaningless and trivial comments of the usual kind.

"Big crowd to-night." . . . "What number is yours?" . . . "I have come prepared." . . . "Don't be too bold, my dear." . . . "Wait till you get the cue." . . . "Well, he has asked for it." . . . "*Do* remember your heart is not very strong."

They were women who spoke these words, the last being a tall, handsome woman with plump arms and a good figure. She leant forward and whispered to Fraquet's wife.

"You here, Mrs. Fraquet! Oh, that is good and brave of you!"

"I don't feel at all brave," said Phillida.

The tall woman laughed. "The bravest people are sometimes the most nervous."



Then she passed on, and Raymond turned to his wife and said:

"Who's that? A fine figure of a woman." He had not heard the whispered words.

"Mrs. Anstruther," said Phillida.

The name conveyed nothing to Fraquet, but he noticed that the lady seemed to know a good many of the others in the stalls, and that they smiled at her or rose in their seats to speak to her, with evident admiration.

Then he turned at the sound of a man's voice speaking to Phillida. It was John le Dreux, looking very tall and handsome in his evening-clothes.

"So you have come," said Mrs. Fraquet.

"I am surprised to find myself here," said John, looking down at her with his grave smile. He nodded to Fraquet, and said, "Well, I will get to my place. It is just behind you."

The great audience also settled down in its place, with that rustling of women's dresses, that confused murmur of voices in a great hall, that vague dull noise which comes into one's ears like the roar of the great sea in a shell held by a listening child.

Some men were arranging papers at the tables on the platform. One of them put down a water-bottle and glass to be within reach of the Prime Minister. Down below the platform a row of Pressmen were sharpening their pencils and telling the latest funny stories from the street of adventure. An unusual number of stewards—stalwart young men who might have been mistaken easily for gentlemen—were in little groups about the hall and whispered to each other in a serious way as though the fate of the Empire, of which they were the chosen defenders, were at stake. Then the organ pealed out with lively old tunes—the last notes of "John Peel" merging into the first notes of "Sally in our Alley."

"Good Lord!" said Raymond Fraquet. "I wish I had brought a book to read. I shall never be able to sit this out."

"Hush!" said Phillida. "See, here comes the Prime Minister!"

"He looks the part," said Fraquet. "Pompous asses, all of them!"

The lights had been turned up, and the great hall was brilliantly illuminated, as there came upon the platform a



number of serious gentlemen in evening-clothes, who filed in with the solemnity of funeral mutes, and with a self-conscious air of being entirely at their ease. The Prime Minister gazed with a blank, absent-minded stare at the great assembly, and stroked his clean-shaven jaw in a thoughtful, impressive way, as a volley of clapping greeted his entry.

At the end of that clapping there came from one of the boxes a curious hissing noise, as though of escaping gas. Then the Prime Minister divided the tails of his black coat and sat down, with a face still as impassive as a bronze Buddha, but better looking.

The chairman of the meeting—Sir John Brimpton, Bart.,—begged to preface the Prime Minister's speech by a few remarks. He desired to remind this vast, this imposing, this magnificent assembly (applause) that the meeting was to mark a new era in social progress (applause), to strike a great blow (applause) at—— He paused, looked down at the Prime Minister, poured himself out a glass of water, drank it, took out his handkerchief, blew his nose, looked at the Prime Minister's secretary, and finished his sentence—"a great blow at the powers of privilege, reaction, prerogative, tyranny and—and—in short—the enemies of the People." (Loud cheers and, from some of the boxes, light, rippling laughter.)

"The Prime Minister to-night," he said, "would make a speech which would echo down the centuries of time. He would voice the great gospel of the Liberal idea. He would, in that masterly way which they all knew, with that eloquence which, in another place, was found so irresistible by his political opponents, with that cold, clear logic for which he was supremely renowned, give a message to England which would go forth from that hall like a trumpet-call to battle and to victory."

Having received the applause for which he waited, and, with a look of surprise, as it was followed by a sibilant sound from several parts of the hall, Sir John Brimpton then drank another glass of water, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will no longer stand between you and the Prime Minister."

The reporters below the platform, who had entirely ignored these prefatory remarks, now arranged their copy-paper, and bent over their table, as the Prime Minister rose



and grasped the lapels of his tail-coat, raised his head, stared with his hard, grey eyes at the farthest gallery, and said:

“My lords, ladies and gentlemen. We are on the eve of a great constitutional, social and national crisis.”

What other words the Prime Minister might have said at that moment have not been recorded in history, in spite of Sir John Brimpton's prophecy that they “would echo down the centuries of time.” He still went on speaking, but nobody heard his words, and the reporters did not take them down. The attention of the great assembly had been diverted suddenly to a woman, who stood up in the centre of the stalls, stretching out a strong white arm towards the Prime Minister, and challenging him, in a loud, clear unfaltering voice.

Raymond, who had turned round sharply in his chair, recognised her instantly as Mrs. Anstruther, who had spoken to his wife.

“What about the women?” she said. “What about your broken pledges? You talk of liberty! Give liberty to those women——”

Like the Prime Minister, she was interrupted in her speech. Before most people, indeed, had heard more than the first few words, a tumult surged in the King's Hall. It began with the sound of laughter, the shrill, scornful laughter of women; but, after those first treble notes, it deepened into an angry roar. Men and women were on their feet, turning their backs to the platform, and, from galleries, boxes and stalls, came shouts of “Throw her out!” “Muzzle her!” “Turn her out—out—out!”—the last word rising with fierce iteration above the confusion of voices and the groans and hisses from all parts of the hall.

The woman, tall, rather statuesque, with that white, outstretched arm, her head, with its heavy coils of hair thrown back a little, and the bosom of her black dress rising and falling as her voice still rang out, but not loud enough to be heard above the din, seemed perfectly unconcerned by the excitement she had caused, and her eyes were fixed upon the Prime Minister, as she continued to denounce him. It seemed quite a long time—it was really half a minute—before eight of the stewards—those stalwart young men who looked so very much like gentlemen—came within reach of her. They came in a great hurry, but they had to thrust their way past rows of men and women, all standing up now and



leaning forward over their chairs to the centre of the stalls.

Phillida was amongst those who were standing. She had gone very white, and one hand was pressed against her side, as though her heart were beating too violently. Raymond was by her side, staring at the tall woman, whose voice rang out louder now, so that her words were clearly heard.

"Votes for women! No taxation without representation!"

Raymond's lips were smiling scornfully, though his eyes were angry.

"Disgraceful!" he said. "Disgraceful!"

The eight stewards now pounced upon the woman, almost struggling with each other to be the first to grasp hold of her. One man tried to seize her wrists, but Mrs. Anstruther twisted her arms free—those white, strong arms of hers—and, raising her right hand, boxed the man's ears, smartly and resolutely, so that he recoiled, with his head thrust back, and one flaming red cheek.

Mrs. Fraquet took a deep breath, and her eyes were burning with excitement. She did not seem to hear the laughter that came from some of the men around her, nor her husband's reiteration of the word "Disgraceful!" nor the low roar which swept round the great hall—such a noise as must have been in the Roman Coliseum when the Gladiators had come to close quarters. It was difficult to see much of Mrs. Anstruther now. The eight stewards, who, a little while ago, might have been mistaken for gentlemen, were struggling with her, pulling at her, trying to force her away from the chair to which she held with extraordinary strength, trying to unclasp those strong hands, trying to stifle that loud, challenging voice. One of the men, with his teeth clenched and a face white with rage, put his arm round her neck and tried to keep his hand over her mouth, though she moved her head from side to side, in spite of his strangle-grip. Another man, in his effort to drag her away, tore her dress with a great rent, so that her shoulder was made bare.

Men were shouting now with laughter. It pleased them to see this enduring fight between one woman and eight men. It was "devilish amusing, by God!" as one young man remarked, close to Mrs. Fraquet, who did not hear his words. Other men and many women were shouting with anger, and again the cry of "Throw her out!" and



the word "out—out—out—" rang above the confusion of noise. The eight stewards were getting the best of it. That was a masterly stroke on the part of the man who had thrust his arm round her neck. He had got his hand well over her nose and mouth now. He was suffocating her. Her face was red and hot, her brown hair, so neatly combed back when Raymond had seen her first, was now all tousled like a street woman's. They were dragging her away, and there was a great clapping of hands, and shouts of "Bravo!" but, from other parts of the hall, a fierce hissing, and cries of "Shame!" They were dragging her along one of the lines of stalls where elderly men, well-dressed women, young bloods from West-End clubs, were leaning back against the chairs to let the stewards pass with their prisoner, some of them thrusting her on, shoving their fists into her—one lady (who wore many diamonds) even pinching her—as she was dragged past.

Once, on their way, Mrs. Anstruther and the eight stewards all fell together across the chairs, and for a few wild moments there was a confused mass of men's arms and legs and coat-tails and crumpled shirts and disordered hair above one half-fainting, half-suffocated woman. But the stewards had all gone to public schools, and received the education of English gentlemen, and they soon disentangled themselves from the "scrum," and dragged the limp woman, no longer strong or struggling, towards the doors. They were rewarded for their heroism by a great burst of cheering. The heart of English chivalry had been stirred!

Mrs. Fraquet had grasped the back of a chair, and was swaying a little to and fro.

"Horrible!" she said. "Horrible!"

Raymond Fraquet thrust back the lock of hair from his forehead.

"A disgrace to her sex!" he said. "A shameless creature!"

The husband and wife did not hear each other's words. No one in that great hall, except the reporters who were now standing excitedly on the long deal table below the platform, heard anything that anyone was saying. Each individual was stirred with the excitement of the crowd, and caught up by passions which do not often thrill an audience in London.

Only the Prime Minister was impassive and cold. He



had taken his seat, and was sitting forward with his elbows on the table, staring into the tumult below.

Mrs. Anstruther's adventure was only the beginning of trouble. Before she had been taken away, there were at least a dozen fights going on in different parts, and challenging cries and counter-cries were being shouted from gallery to gallery, from box to box, from stall to stall. The militant women were in every quarter of the great hall. From the gallery a large green banner was suspended with "Votes for Women" in big white letters. A red-headed girl, who had unfurled it, was addressing the Prime Minister, whose eyes were raised to her for a moment, and then drooped and pondered over the table upon which his elbows rested, as though he had no interest in the scene. The people in the stalls also stared up, and saw men moving rapidly from each end of the gallery towards that red-headed girl with the green banner, saw how she struggled with them, how the banner was torn from her grasp, how the girl clung to the rail of the gallery, how the men tore at her and fought with her to get her away.

But the scene was too distant to be enjoyable. There was better sport nearer at hand. There were two more women in the stalls who stood up and denounced the Prime Minister—that silent, impassive man, with the hard, weary eyes, on the platform. Instantly another group of stewards dashed at them. The foremost dealt one of the women a violent blow on the chest, so that she staggered back, and nearly fell. The other woman—she was hardly a woman, being, indeed, a slim girl of twenty or so, with neatly plaited coils of fair brown hair—turned upon the man who had struck the blow, and cried "Coward!" at him with flashing eyes. Then she was seized, and the big, square hand of a man with agricultural ancestors, gagged her, squeezing her nose tightly and closing her mouth.

This was a mere trivial episode to what followed. A lady was on the platform, within a yard of the Prime Minister. She was talking to him seriously, though he did not turn his head to listen. It was a moment or two before the stewards noticed that the very citadel had been stormed by one of their enemies. Their attention was drawn to her by the Prime Minister's supporters, who rose from their seats, expostulating with the lady, rebuking her angrily, and even attempting to argue with her—though she ignored them,



and addressed only the Prime Minister, who did not seem to listen—but not laying hands on her.

A little battalion of stewards made a rush for the platform. In their desperate hurry to get to the woman they did not go round by the steps, but tried to scale the height by means of the reporters' table. Some of the Pressmen seemed to resent this encroachment, and two of the stewards were thrust back, falling heavily. Others reached the platform in safety. One of them was very swift—a young, clean-shaven fellow, with sandy hair and freckles. He went straight for the woman, who was talking louder now, so that some of her words were heard.

“You have betrayed us! You gave us a most solemn pledge——”

Then she was silenced. The sandy-haired young man thrust out his arm, and his clenched fist, and hit the woman on the jaw, just below her pointed chin. It was a knock-out blow, and most effective. The lady fell like a log, and was quite helpless in the hands of the other stewards who had come to the support of their heroic comrade. Curiously, however, the sandy-haired man was not acclaimed as a hero by everyone. In spite of the cheers and laughter of many people who happened to be watching this episode of the fray—there were many distractions—signs of disapproval were heard. One man below the platform shouted out, “You blackguard! You dirty cad!” He was one of the journalists, and immediately paid the penalty of his unchivalrous sentiments, for he was hit twice over the head, and once on the nose by a steward, who happened to be within reach of him, before he could turn to defend himself. Then he had a fight on his own account, and got the worst of it.

“Good Lord!” said Fraquet. “It is developing into a general warfare. What infernal women! We had better get out of this, Phillida.”

“No, no!” said Phillida quickly. “I must stay, Raymond. I must see this out.”

She spoke breathlessly, almost as though she had been one of the struggling women.

Raymond was right in saying that the scene was developing into a general fight. These combats between men and women, passive resisters though most of the women were, seemed to have fired the blood of the great crowd who had come to the hall in such a quiet, orderly, respectable, well-



dressed way. It was almost as though the men, like animals who had smelt blood, had become possessed with a touch of madness. At first the stewards only, had, in the interests of chivalry, and with that intense reverence for ideal womanhood which animates our English gentlemen, attacked by six to one, and in some cases by twenty to one, the ladies who were disgracing their sex by calling upon the Prime Minister to redeem his pledges. But now many other gentlemen in the stalls and galleries were stirred up to do these deeds of prowess, and when any woman rose with the cry of "Votes" they were about her before she could finish her foolish sentence. It was these unprofessional stewards, these volunteers, who gave the highest examples of the way to deal with erring women.

One of these started the idea of seizing a woman's hair, tearing out her hairpins, and twisting the coils about the woman's throat and mouth. This was seen to be so extraordinarily effective in obtaining quick strangulation and surrender that it was followed by other volunteers. Unfortunately it aroused the passions of some of the men present, who were not so steeped in the traditions of English chivalry and reverence for ideal womanhood. With water in their blood they were weak enough to resent this method as being unnecessarily painful and violent. In several cases, too, ladies who had no intention of crying "Votes for Women," but who stood up to see, or to scoff, were mistaken by the volunteers for militant suffragettes and dealt with in the same firm (and as the newspapers afterwards explained), gentle way. This annoyed their brothers, and even men entirely unrelated and unknown to them, to such a degree that, with scandalous lack of discernment in the gravity of the situation, and faithless to the gospel of man's supremacy, they struck out blindly against the very men who were doing their best for morality and manhood. They became the enemies of their own sex, and gave black eyes and large bumps to the volunteers and professionals.

History records that they paid a heavy price for their betrayal. One man was stunned outright, others were thrown violently downstairs after being dragged and cuffed, and drummed out of the hall. One man had evidently taken leave of his senses, although he was a good-looking, square-shouldered fellow who might have been a young officer of the Guards. He was in a box with three ladies, well out of the way of the



strife, though just above one of the scimmages, in which forty or fifty men were actually struggling with each other in order to have the privilege of disarming a lady with a dogwhip. That wretched woman—a tall and handsome woman as she was—who had the cruel and vicious spirit to defend herself with a light whip against forty unarmed men, and who actually dared to lash the face of one man who was endeavouring to get the strangle-grip upon her, will go down to history with the infamous Clytemnestra, and the still more infamous Jezebel. It was therefore all the more extraordinary that the young man in the box should come to her assistance. He came in an unexpected way. Very calmly putting one leg over the edge of the box he then jumped lightly down into the arena, and with a cry of "Yoicks!" sprang at the man who had now wrested the whip from the woman's hand, and seizing him by the throat hurled him at least five yards away. He then struck out right and left, and fought like a devil incarnate until he was overpowered by superior numbers.

"Ye Gods!" said a young man by the side of Raymond Fraquet. "This is better than a Rugby scrum! It's the finest thing I've seen for a long time. Wouldn't have missed it for worlds!"

Fraquet did not agree with him. All this struggle and strife sickened him. It was a descent into sheer barbarity. Never could he have conceived that women should so degrade themselves. It was horrible—too frightful!

He turned round to speak to Phillida. He must really get her away from this bear-pit. But he did not speak to her. He stared at her with wide, horror-struck eyes, and went white to the lips.

As he turned towards her he heard her mutter something about "not being able to stand this any longer," and then she stood up very straight and threw her head back, and raised a slim white arm and a clenched hand, and in a loud voice, rather shrill, and harsher than he had ever known it, cried out:

"Cowards! How dare you assault women like this—in this brutal way. Votes for Women! Votes for Women! Votes for Women!"

A madness seemed to have seized her. There was a beautiful colour in her face, and her eyes were burning, as she reiterated her cry.

"By God!" said a man, two rows of stalls away.



"There's another of 'em. Here, get out of the way!" and he clambered over the back of the chairs to come to her.

Fraquet took a step nearer to his wife. There were beads of sweat on his white forehead.

"Phillida!" he said, with a half-strangled cry. "How dare you! Good God! Phillida!"

A man's arm thrust him back violently. "Let me deal with her."

From other parts of the stalls men were rushing towards her. The foremost had already seized her wrist and swung her round.

"Cowards!" she said hoarsely. "Cowards!"

One of the men laughed—an excited, rather brutal laugh—in spite of his being one of those who reverence the Ideal Womanhood.

"Hold her hands," he said. "Get her hairpins out! You blithering idiot, get out of the way, can't you?"

These last words were to Fraquet, who was thrust back again as he tried desperately to get near his wife.

Fifteen seconds had passed since the first of the volunteers had scrambled over the backs of the chairs to reach Mrs. Fraquet. At the sixteenth second, when four men were trying to suffocate her into silence, a new-comer had arrived upon the scene of action. It was John le Dreux, M.D. of Edinburgh. For the past twenty minutes he had been standing with folded arms (and with clenched fists hidden by those folded arms) staring at this extraordinary tumult, with grave, steady eyes, and with his lips firmly pressed together, and with two vertical lines in the centre of his forehead. He felt his blood gradually getting hotter and hotter, gradually mounting up to his brain. He was trying to get a grip on himself, trying not to let those clenched fists of his loose from the folded arms. For the past fourteen seconds he had been aware that another woman was struggling in the grasp of several men, quite close to him in the first stalls, and the blood had mounted a little closer to his brain. And two seconds ago he had seen that the woman was Mrs. Fraquet. Then the blood had leapt into his brain.

He sprang forward with a strange inarticulate cry, with one hand on the back of a chair, vaulted the two rows of stalls as he had often vaulted a five-barred gate in Yorkshire, and like a long, lithe animal he stretched forward and grasped one of the men's necks in a grip of iron, so that



the man gave a shout of pain and fear, and then let go of Phillida, and staggered forward with his hands thrust out.

"Get off!" said John. "Get off, you dogs, or, by God, I'll kill you!"

He dealt a frightful back-handed blow at one of the other men, who had turned at his onslaught and relaxed his grasp from Phillida's throat. It struck him in the chest, in the centre of his crumpled shirt-front, and he fell all huddled up with a curious rattling noise in his throat.

The two other men, one of them with a piece of Phillida's bodice in his hand, the other, releasing his hold upon her coils of hair, walked away backwards from John le Dreux, staring at him as though his blazing eyes had death in them.

Mrs. Fraquet had fallen, half-fainting, across one of the chairs. Her face was like wax, and her eyes were half-closed, and she was moaning. Her hair was all loose about her face and her bodice was torn to rags.

John had cleared a space around him. For a moment or two the group of men, the volunteer "chuckers-out," had retired a few paces to reconnoitre the enemy. They did not like the look of him.

That moment or two gave John time to bend over Mrs. Fraquet, to put his hand on her wrist, to feel her pulse, to whisper "Courage!" as her eyes opened and a faint smile flickered about her lips, and to turn swiftly to Fraquet (who had forced his way through and was now standing in a dazed way before Phillida) and to say:

"Pull yourself together, man. Look after your wife. I shall have to take care of myself for the next few minutes."

He turned just in time to guard his head from a smashing blow. He took it on his left arm, and the knuckles of his right hand came with a sharp knock under his opponent's jaw. John's psychology was curious in that moment. The fierce, blind rage which had seized him when he saw that Phillida was being assaulted had left him. He was perfectly calm, his brain felt as clear as crystal, and he smiled with a strange baffling smile at his antagonists. In that one moment he seemed to see every detail of the scene before him, to hear every sound in the great hall. He saw the glittering lights of the electric lamps, the people crowding to the front of the galleries and boxes staring down in his direction. He saw the



Prime Minister on the platform. He was standing now with his hand stretched out as though commanding peace, when there was no peace. He heard the distant sound of scuffling, the babel of thousands of voices all speaking together, the strains of the organ playing "Oh, dear, what can the matter be?" A sudden gust of laughter, the fierce oath of one of the men in front of him. He saw the faces of those men—clean-shaven, broad-shouldered fellows. They had an ugly look in their eyes. He noticed that one of them was without a tie, and that one side of his collar was hanging loose.

Then at the end of that second, during which so many images crowded into his brain, he saw a forward movement among the men in a half-circle about him. They came with a rush at him, and though his left arm shot out straight from the shoulder and knocked one of the men down like a ninepin, he was overpowered by numbers. One had got him by the throat. Another had gripped him round the waist, another pinned his elbows to his side. A third went for his legs, and was hitting him behind the knees to bring him to the ground. Then a blow struck him on the temple and all the lights of the King's Hall seemed to flash into his eyes, and the noise of the organ and the uproar seemed to be a long way off. He felt himself being dragged through a crowd of people. A gust of cold air swept against his face. He was in silence now, in some stone passage, still held tightly by strong hands, still being cuffed, and thumped, and scragged, though he felt no pain. He was being pushed downstairs, they seemed like thousands of stairs, before he reached the bottom, then he was banged up against a swing door which gave way before him, and shot out into a street.

"Don't say you didn't ask for it," said a voice. "We gave it to you in the neck this time, and serve you damn well right."

Another voice gave a gruff laugh, and said, "Hold up, guv'nor. They have been playing football with you, I don't think." And a strong hand kept him from falling.

John le Dreux put his hands to his head, which was aching with a dull throbbing pain. Then he saw that he was leaning against a big policeman, and that an enormous crowd of people was being kept back a yard away by a police cordon, and by mounted men. He was outside the hall, without hat or overcoat, without even a collar and tie, his shirt-front crumpled like a dirty pocket-handkerchief, his trousers covered with



mud and white chalk, a great rent below the right knee, and something warm and sticky trickling down his right cheek. Nobody in the street of mansions would have recognised John le Dreux whose brass plate was on the railings of the corner ground-floor flat.

## CHAPTER XIV

MR. and Mrs. Fraquet travelled home by cab after the King's Hall meeting.

To Raymond the journey was a psychological experience of an unusual kind. He had never put anything like it into any of his plays—and it was exceedingly painful. Phillida had left her cloak behind, and he had lost his overcoat and opera hat. His collar was limp, his shirt crumpled, and he had the feeling of a man who had been drunk and disorderly. As the passing lights flashed into the four-wheeler he saw that his wife had an appearance corresponding to his own feelings. Her tousled hair, her torn bodice, her white face, her half-shut eyes, as she sat back in the cab were horribly suggestive of a street woman who had been fighting and was now half-stupefied with the fumes of gin.

She had been helped into the cab by six or seven of the women who had also been evicted. Mrs. Anstruther, who had begun the strife, was among them, and she patted Phillida's shoulders as she passed on her husband's arm, and said:

"Well done, my dear! Bravely done! You were splendid, they tell me."

Phillida smiled, ever so faintly, and just said, "Thank you." As soon as they were inside the cab Fraquet put his head out and said "Go on!" to the driver.

"Where?" said the man.

For the life of him Raymond could not think of his address. All his thoughts were whirling with the memories of the past half-hour.

"Anywhere!" he said. "Over Chelsea Bridge." A few moments later he remembered and gave the man the direction of the street of mansions beyond the river.

Mrs. Fraquet asked him to leave the window down, and she leaned forward a little to let the wind blow into her face. It seemed to revive her, and she put up her hands to smooth back her disordered hair.



"I must look frightful!" she said.

"The whole thing was frightful!" said Fraquet.

"It seems like a mad dream!" said his wife.

"My God!" said Raymond, "why did you go mad like the others, Phillida? Why did you behave like that? I could not believe that my wife——"

"Hush!" said Phillida. "I am very proud of having done what I did. Oh, Raymond, I am so proud! So proud! Because at heart I am a coward, and I was very much afraid."

Fraquet stared at his wife in a frightened way. He began to think that she must be really mad. He was sick with shame, filled with a blind anger. What would the world say to-morrow? He could see already those paragraphs in the newspapers. "Mrs. Raymond Fraquet." "The wife of the well-known playwright." "Disgraceful scenes!" "Disorderly women." His own reputation would suffer horribly. He would be jeered at by his friends and enemies as the husband of a shrieking suffragette! He was tempted to relieve his anger by wild, whirling words, to call his wife all kinds of cruel names, to break out into oaths and blasphemy. He was a little mad himself. He could almost have struck his wife for having forgotten her womanhood.

And then, looking at her sitting opposite in the cab, he saw how all the colour had gone out of her face, and how she was smiling in the darkness, into which there flashed the light of the street lamps, and how she had a strange look of spiritual ecstasy. Into the midst of his passionate anger there crept a little thrill of admiration for her beauty, and a sense of something like fear. She was his wife, and yet a stranger to him. He could not understand her, though they had been together all these years! A student of human nature, a master of psychology, he had no knowledge of what was going on inside Phillida's soul—inside the mind and heart of his own wife! He sat silent, pondering over this mystery, utterly miserable, still seething with anger, and a bundle of quivering nerves. Neither husband nor wife spoke another word until the cab pulled up in the street of mansions.

That the nerves of both of them were in a disordered condition was proved by the scene that followed Raymond's rat-tat-tat upon the door-knocker of his flat. It was answered by their maidservant. When she opened the door and saw her master and mistress, she stared at them both with startled eyes, and then gave a shrill cry of dismay.

"Lord A'mighty, ma'am! What's been the matter? Oh, my dear lady, what in the world 'as 'appened to you both?"

Phillida flung her arms round the woman's neck with a little hysterical laugh, and then burst into tears and sobbed on her servant's shoulder.

"Damn it!" said Raymond, with every nerve in his body quivering. "We are not going to have any more scenes, are we?"

He strode fiercely into his study, and banged the door behind him. When he turned on the electric light with a click, the first thing he saw was himself—or the horrible caricature of himself—in the opposite mirror. He looked a battered wreck—dirty, dissolute and disreputable. He was not a bit like Raymond Fraquet, dramatist.

Later that evening the husband and wife met in the drawing-room. Phillida had put on a filmy white dress, and her hair was neatly coiled again. She was still very pale, but a colour crept into her face when Raymond came in, also normal and neat again, in his everyday clothes, and she looked at him with a glint of amusement in her eyes, and a little smile about her lips.

"That is an improvement, isn't it?" she said.

Raymond sat down on the sofa, and his face was stern and white.

"Phillida, we must have this business out before we go to bed to-night."

"Well, don't get angry," said Phillida. "Let us talk reasonably and calmly."

Raymond sprang to his feet and strode over to the mantelpiece.

"God in heaven!" he said. "How can you expect me to be calm and reasonable? Were you calm and reasonable when you got up this evening and behaved like a mad woman?"

"I am sorry if I shocked you, Raymond," said Phillida, very humbly and contritely.

"You shocked me—to my soul," he said bitterly.

"I am sorry," said Phillida. "I am afraid you will have to get used to it, Raymond. Because, you see, this is only the beginning."

"Only the beginning." Those words burnt themselves into his brain. He repeated them in a dazed way, and then



said, "What do you mean? What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean," said Phillida, "that I have taken the plunge. I cannot go back now, I must go on——"

"Go on where?" said Raymond.

"After those scenes to-night, the brutality of those men, the savage cruelty of them, I see that these suffrage women are right. There can be no real hope for humanity so long as men are allowed to retain their hideous old traditions. To-night you saw, Raymond, how the men revealed themselves. Because a few women dared to get up and address a few straight questions to a Prime Minister at a political meeting, they were knocked about, gagged, and handled vilely by men who call themselves gentlemen. You see how false all men's sentiment about women really is! They are angels so long as they smile and simper and remain perfectly tame and stupid. Man's well-known chivalry towards the fair sex is beautiful to behold! But, once let them take an intelligent interest in public life, or make a claim on their own behalf, and then all the sickly sentiment drops off men, like a flimsy cloak, and their brutality is seen in its nakedness and they knock the women about. To-night has made me see it all clearly, and I shall go on—I shall go on, Raymond, and adopt the new cry of women, and do as much as my courage and strength will let me do, whatever the cost."

"The cost will be rather heavy," said Raymond. "If you adopt the methods and manners of these turbulent women, it will cost you my love and respect. Do you understand that?"

"I understand," said Phillida very quietly. "I understand that I may lose some of my friends, and that I may even lose the love of my husband. But that will be if he is not broad-minded and generous, and large-hearted enough to let me follow my own convictions, however wrong he may think them. If that happens—and I face the possibility of it—I shall say my husband's love was not worth having. I shall say that it was merely a selfish, egotistical, narrow love, and not a very serious loss."

Raymond stared at her as one struck dumb, and, a little later, he said, "Good God! Good God!" in a pitiful way.

He tried to find some arguments to beat down his wife's opinion. He even pleaded with her to stand on one side, though she might believe in this new cry of "Votes for

Women," and to let other women work for the cause. Surely, for his sake, she might be moderate and reasonable.

But she swept his arguments on one side. "Raymond!" she said, turning to him with her face flushed and her eyes burning. "Have you no pride? Men have laid hands on me to-night."

"It was horrible!" said Raymond.

"Yes, horrible," said Phillida. "I do not know anything about politics. I care very little for the vote. There are many wise and good women who have been working and sacrificing themselves for their ideals of social reform. Those ideals mean very little to me because I am ignorant. But I will give all I have—my life, if necessary—to bring the day nearer when men shall not dare to treat a woman as I and many others were handled to-night."

"It was horrible!" said Raymond. "Horrible!"

"Yes," said Phillida. "How could you—you, Raymond—an idealist, a man who believes in chivalry, stand by and see these things done?"

"It is because I believe in chivalry," said Raymond, "that I hate to see women degrading themselves and degraded. And I tried to protect you. You saw that, Phillida?"

He said these last words in self-defence, and he asked the question excitedly, as though his self-respect depended on her answer.

Phillida looked at her husband very gravely. "I did not see you," she said. "There was only one man who came to my defence. It was Dr. le Dreux. The men fell away before him. I shall never forget how splendid he looked. His fierce eyes—his great strength."

"I was there before him," said Raymond excitedly. "Surely you saw how I struggled with those fellows! They nearly tore me to pieces. You have not thanked me for that."

"Oh," said Phillida, "I thank you now."

She put her hands on his shoulders and would have kissed him, but he turned away irritably.

"It is always the same with women," he said. "A stranger comes to their assistance, and they are ready to worship him. A husband gets knocked about on their behalf, and they call him a coward!"

"I did not call you a coward, Raymond," said Phillida. "I think you did your best."



Those words hurt the man frightfully. He knew that his best had been a feeble thing. He had never learnt to use his fists, and he had not the fighting physique.

"You despise me," he said. "In your heart, as with all women, you like the brute best. Brute strength and mastery are what women worship. This outcry for equality and liberty, this ridiculous denunciation of men's tyranny is all hypocrisy. Phillida," he said very solemnly, "I warn you that you are on a path which leads to mental and moral tragedy."

"Perhaps we are both a little overwrought to-night," said Phillida. "We shall look at things more calmly in the morning."

Whatever calm prevailed in the cold light of next day, there were many excited brains in London that night, and in "Intellectual Mansions," West and South-West, many men and more women who did not go quickly to sleep, but thought and thought, of the wild scenes in the King's Hall.

John le Dreux was one of those. After a few minutes in the fresh air, and a stiff dose of brandy at a public-house near South Kensington station, he felt the old strength ebbing back into his veins, and, with the exception of a few dull aches about his head and body, was as well as ever he had been in his life, so well that he walked all the way home, ignoring the people who turned to look at the hatless man in evening-dress, all dirty and dilapidated, that was himself, and filled with a strange glow and exhilaration. Once or twice he laughed aloud, thus confirming the conviction of the passers-by that this tall, big-boned fellow was lamentably drunk. The fight had done him a lot of good. It was like a mental and moral tonic, in spite of the knocking about which had been the end of it. He was strong, and he had put out his strength, and for the first few rounds, anyhow, until overpowered by numbers, his enemies had gone down before him. He had got in some honest, straight, knock-down blows—and in a noble cause. That passion which had made a madman of him for half a minute, so that he saw red, and meant death, had been gloriously justified.

He had rescued Phillida Fraquet from the grasp of hostile men—that was pretty good for a doctor with a petty-fogging practice over the water—because Phillida was the one woman in the world to him, and he had fought in her service. It was a wonderful stroke of luck! Some special



Providence must have sent him to the King's Hall against his will, and by the merest chance, as it seemed. He knew that Phillida had come out safely. He had seen her get into the cab and drive away with her husband, while he stayed in the shadow, talking quietly to the good-natured policeman, and trying to get his brain clear. The sight of Phillida had made him clear-headed, because suddenly it was revealed to him in an extraordinary way that he loved her, and that he would fight until he dropped down dead to save her little finger from a pain. He was glad to know that. It put wine into his heart and blood. What a fool he had been not to know it before!

He thought of it all the way home. He remembered how he first met her in the flat upstairs, and how the first sound of her voice had given him a curious thrill. Ever since then he had known, in a dim, vague sort of way, that her beauty, her graciousness, her simplicity, meant more to him than the beauty of other women's kindness. Now, to-night only, had he understood everything quite clearly. The first revelation had been when he saw her struggling in the hands of men. In a flash his brain was clear to the fact that he would kill any man with a great joy who would not release his hands from her wrists or from her neck and mouth. The second revelation was when she passed out on her way to the cab. Then he knew that he loved her.

"It is deuced funny!" said John aloud, as he strode over Chelsea Bridge. "Here am I, a doctor, living on small fees, and a perfect ass in many respects, feeling as bucked up and as full of bloodthirstiness and romantic love as a knight at the Court of King Arthur. I suppose it's due to these old ancestors of mine—so God give grace to them. Amen."

It only seemed to him, as he sat up in bed smoking his last pipe, that it was a little awkward to be so gloriously in love with a married woman. That took him by surprise. "Good Lord!" he said. "I never thought of that!" He thought about it a good deal then, and came to the decided conclusion that Raymond Fraquet was a poor weed, and utterly unworthy of being the husband of such a woman as Phillida. "Why, the fellow would have stood by and seen her roughly handled without putting up his fists!" he said aloud to himself. Then he puffed out his candle and went to sleep as peacefully as a babe.



The next morning, when he was shaving, he began to think over his experiences of the night before, and wondered whether he had been rather light-headed, or whether, really and truly, he was a love-sick man. With his shaving-brush poised above his chin, he thought the matter out earnestly, diagnosed his symptoms with professional impartiality, and settled the case conclusively.

"Yes," he said; "it's all right. I am as much in love as ever a man was, and I shall have to be very careful. If I fall out with that fellow Fraquet, there will be serious complications, and if I allow Phillida to see by the flick of an eyelid into my state of feeling, I shall have to clear out of this flat, abandon my practice, and retire to the country for the sake of my moral and mental health. Fortunately, she is not in the least in love with me, and there is no law of church or State to prevent a man loving a married woman, so long as he keeps his mouth shut and a firm grip upon the devils that tempt him to indiscretion. Anyhow, I feel very jolly with myself this morning, and the point is, when am I going to see Phillida again?"

The point was settled by Phillida, who came round to his flat at tea-time and thanked him for his gallant defence at the King's Hall.

She did not use those words. She said, "I shall never forget what you did—how splendid you were. I hope they did not hurt you very much."

John laughed. "I think some of those fellows' heads will ache a bit to-day. They will remember me. But I admit I felt rather foolish when they kicked me downstairs. It is not a very dignified position for a medical man."

Phillida put her hand on his sleeve. "Doctor, you did not think I was a disgrace to my sex? You did not think I was violating every law of womanhood? You do not deny the justice of this claim for equal rights with men?"

"Rather not!" said John heartily. "I haven't the slightest notion what you want the vote for. I would hand you mine with pleasure, as a free gift. I have never walked to a ballot-box in my life. But if you want it for any mysterious and benevolent purpose, there is every reason why you should have it. Anyhow, I am always ready to hit a man on the nose if he ill-treats a woman. Believe me, when I say that."

"I do believe," said Phillida, very earnestly.



"Of course," said John, "I don't want to make a habit of this sort of thing. It might interfere with my practice."

Phillida was surprised by his merriment and high spirits. She had never seen John le Dreux look so handsome; his grey eyes had never had such a glinty light in them.

"I am afraid there will be a good many more scenes like that of last night," said Mrs. Fraquet—"only more fierce and more perilous. You see, the women are getting rather desperate. They have waited long enough, and they have been treated with such continual harshness and injustice and cruelty that they will go to any lengths now, to get their way. That is what these foolish politicians will not understand. They think they can crush down their movement under an iron heel. They think women may be frightened and tortured into surrender. They do not know the spirit of a woman when she is once roused. I know, because I am a woman, and I also have been roused—from my sleep, from my years of sleep, and indifference."

John was silent. Something in Phillida's face scared him.

"Don't be too rash," he said. "I should hate you to get hurt—really hurt; you see, I shall not always be handy by your side."

She looked at John with her candid eyes, and then a beautiful colour crept into her face when he said, in a low voice:

"I should be very glad if that might be possible, Mrs. Fraquet."

They were silent for a moment, and then she looked up again, and said as though to divert the line of conversation:

"What does your sister think?"

"Oh, Madge!" said John. "To be quite truthful, she thinks you must have taken leave of your senses. She was horribly shocked last night when I described our adventure. Of course my appearance was rather peculiar when I let myself in with the latch-key." He laughed quietly at the reminiscence.

"I think a good many of my friends will think like Madge," said Mrs. Fraquet. "They do not understand."

Then she said good-bye, and John shook hands with her very politely, and wondered for one wild moment what she would do if he suddenly went down on both knees and revealed



his love which was like burning coals in his heart. Of course he did no such thing, and when he had closed the door behind her he put on a pipe and smoked it in the most commonplace way, as though he were the same man as yesterday and the day before yesterday, instead of having become changed into another being by a happy miracle. Nevertheless he was not so comfortable in his mind. Mrs. Fraquet had frightened him a good deal. Something had changed the quiet gracious woman as he had been changed, though in a different way. There was something in her eyes which told him that she was ready for any dangerous or desperate thing. He was afraid that she would get hurt in this struggle for the enfranchisement of women. He was horribly afraid of that.

There were quite a number of people in the street of mansions who were afraid that Phillida Fraquet would get hurt, morally, mentally, and physically in her new mode of life. All her friends—Madge le Dreux, Winifred Vernon, Bernadine Brett, Patsy, Bertram Ordish, the old ladies in the back blocks, and the literary and artistic people who came to the Fraquets' flat for intellectual conversation and impressionistic music, followed her adventures, and discussed her motives, with anxious interest. If the old legend were true that our ears burn when people are talking about one, Mrs. Fraquet's ears must have been very hot for weeks. Take, for instance, the flat of the three girls upstairs. There were royal battles there which began with a casual remark and ended with violence. It was all Patsy's fault to begin with, because she could not leave the subject alone, and the violence was generally Winifred's, who put an end to Patsy's arguments by throwing things about, such as cushions or six-shilling novels, or other light and handy objects, generally in the direction of Patsy's head. One of these scenes may be described in detail. It was typical of all of them.

Patsy had come home to afternoon tea after shopping at Liberty's. She dropped her brown-paper parcels on to the floor, took an enormous hatpin out of a still more enormous hat, laid them both on her lap and stared at one of her own sketches on the wall with sad and gloomy eyes.

"Good God, my dear child!" said Winifred, who was eating crumpets very cheerfully and reading the typescript of one of her own stories. "Don't look like a dying duck in a thunderstorm. You will turn the milk sour."

"I have been frightfully upset," said Patsy.

"You look it," said Winifred, turning over a leaf and reading on very calmly.

"I saw a dreadful thing this afternoon," said Patsy.

"Well, don't curdle my blood with it," said Winifred.

Bernadine, who was on her knees toasting the crumpets which Winifred was eating, was more interested.

"What was it? Somebody run over?"

"Worse than that," said Patsy.

Winifred dropped her papers with a sigh. "I see you mean to tell the story. Get it over, Patsy, so that I may go on reading."

"I saw Phillida this afternoon," said Patsy.

"Was she as horrible as all that?" said Winifred.

Patsy ignored this flippancy. "I saw her standing on a kerbstone outside Victoria District station."

"My word!" said Winifred. "What an atrocious thing to do."

"I saw her standing there, as beautiful as a queen——"

"They are all ugly," said Winifred.

"And—I could hardly believe my eyes—selling 'Votes for Women,' like a common coster! I heard her say 'Votes for Women, price one penny.' I saw well-dressed men turn round to smile at her. I heard one man say to his friend, 'Silly creature—but she's devilish good-looking.' And then I saw something else which made me turn quite faint and sick."

"'Twas a little boy, a little red-cheeked boy, who put his fingers to his nose," said Winifred, "and, oh, the pity of it!"

Bernadine laughed. "Don't be so absurd, Winifred! Let Patsy tell her story."

"I saw Raymond come along. He came quickly out of the District station. He was beautifully dressed and looked just perfect."

"Never mind how he looked," said Winifred. "What the devil did the man do, my dear?"

"He walked quickly out of the Underground. He stopped for a minute to buy a *Westminster Gazette*, and then, turning round, he saw his wife. He saw Phillida offering her papers to the passers-by. She did not know her husband was there, and he stood looking at her with a most frightful, pitiful expression on his face. He was as white as a sheet.



Then he turned away and walked quickly across the road. Oh, it was a miserable, heart-rending little tragedy! How can she do it! How *can* she do it!"

Patsy put a lace handkerchief to her eyes and dabbed them to keep the tears back.

"Now that you have finished talking abject rot I will go on with my reading," said Winifred, and she picked up her papers. But there was an angry flush on her face.

"Winifred!" cried Patsy, wringing her hands together. "How can you go on reading when the heart of a noble man is being broken by his wife's folly and madness. We ought to try and prevent this tragedy. We ought all to go to Phillida and beg her, on our knees, to return to her duty, and to abandon her degrading way of life. She must be bewitched. Oh, I could tear those suffragette women limb from limb. They are making the very name of women a by-word and reproach."

Winifred flung her papers on to the sofa. "Confound it!" she cried angrily, "why are some women born without brains? Patsy, you little idiot, go on with your potty painting and leave alone the things you cannot understand."

"Hush!" said Bernadine. "I sympathise with Phillida, but I quite agree with Patsy that Raymond must be having a rotten time."

He deserves a rotten time," said Winifred. "He is a selfish, weak kind of egoist. Why, for years Phillida has not had a look in, and now that she is playing her own hand he goes about as if the whole world were crumbling under his feet. If he had any sense he would be proud to live in the same street with her."

"Proud!" cried Patsy. "Oh, she is behaving disgracefully. She actually spoke to a Cabinet Minister yesterday as he was getting into his motor-car. She laid her hand on his arm and said, 'When are you going to be honest?' Perhaps you haven't seen the *Mail* this morning? The whole dreadful thing is there black and white. 'Mr. Raymond Fraquet's wife and the Colonial Secretary.' It made me quite ill to read it."

"You'll feel worse if you go on like that," said Winifred, feeling for a cushion. "If it has become a crime to speak to a Cabinet Minister in this country, the sooner we emigrate the better. As for Phillida, I admire her good sense and envy her pluck. It is not a nice thing, I assure you, to brave the



ridicule and scorn of women with fluffy brains and men with hard-boiled eyes."

"Poor Raymond! Poor Raymond!" said Patsy, heaving such a long-drawn sigh that Winifred's nerves could not stand the strain of it, and she flung the cushion and broke a teacup.

Patsy's pity for Raymond Fraquet was not misplaced. He was one of the many miserable men in London. There were times when he found himself so tortured by anger and shame and fright that he was tempted to abandon everything and go wandering away into the country, somewhere anywhere, like one of those people who disappear, become a nine-days' wonder in the newspapers, and are never heard of again. In a morbid way he almost enjoyed that thought of the head-lines in the papers: "*Mysterious Disappearance of a Famous Playwright.*"

He, too, like Patsy thought that Phillida must be bewitched. There were days when he believed her to be mad. This delicate, refined girl, who was his wife, this beautiful sensitive woman, who in the old days had shrank from any coarse word as though from a blow, who was nervous in society, and so timid of strangers that she was too much of a home-bird, had suddenly changed into a militant suffragette—a virago, a desperate woman, one chosen for the most perilous service! And yet—that was the most extraordinary and baffling thing—she had not changed her character so completely as her actions suggested. She was even more winning and girlish than she had been for a long time, as though a few years had been taken away from her, and she had regained youthfulness and light spirits. He was startled by a new gaiety in her moods, by a keener sense of humour, by a sweetness of manner towards him which excited him, and made him emotional, as though he had fallen in love with her again. She met his angry arguments, his fierce and passionate protests, with a kind of teasing playfulness. She would put her arms about his neck, just as in the old days, and lean her head against his shoulder, and say:

"My dear boy, do not be cross with me. I must do these things. There is no earthly need to worry. It's the greatest fun in the world—and to-morrow I am going to challenge a Cabinet Minister, so don't be surprised if I don't come home. I shall probably spend the night in Cannon Row police station with a few friends."



What was a husband to say to a wife like that? What was the use of raving at her, bullying her, cursing the women who had led her astray, pleading with her, almost praying to her, if at the end of it all she said, as she would say:

"Raymond, you must make up your mind to it. Nothing will alter me. This is my work in life, and you have no right to thwart me. Come, be kind and good. Let us sing some songs together and be happy while we may."

It was frightful and damnable, and Raymond Fraquet, dramatist, found himself in the middle of a melodrama without any hold on the plot. He tried desperately to intervene, to bring his own influence to bear on the situation, but he was strangely powerless. One morning he went up to the headquarter offices of the suffrage society of which his wife was a member. It was in a block of buildings near the Law Courts, and guarded by two policemen, who grinned and touched their helmets to the ladies who went in and out. The place was thronged with these women, all of them well-dressed, many of them young, some of them pretty, and most of them gay and high-spirited. Wearing the suffrage colours of green and white, or in dresses which had obviously been made in Mayfair, or, at the furthest, High Street, Kensington, they passed up and down the stairways, interchanging merry words, thronged the office rooms where they applied for papers, posters, bills, leaflets and literature from a number of girls behind desks and deal tables, and seemed to be as busily engaged as canvassers in the height of an election. Others were waiting their turn to be admitted to the higher room where they stayed a minute or two at most. It was obvious to any stranger that in this room was the organising and controlling brain of this society of women. A bright-looking girl of twenty-five or so revealed this clearly enough when she came out, with rather flushed cheeks, nodded to a friend and said:

"I have got my fighting orders. I am off to Newcastle to-night. You will read all about it, I hope, in Saturday's papers."

"Don't be too bold, Jenny."

"Oh, I shall make things pretty warm, I hope. *Adieu*, my dear."

Raymond Fraquet wanted to get into that room from which the "fighting orders" were being issued. He wanted to give a piece of his mind to the lady whose brain conceived



and controlled this conspiracy of womanhood, and who sent young girls away on dangerous missions "to make things pretty warm." God God!

Having been kept waiting for nearly half an hour, he was admitted to the inner office, and came face to face with the woman who has led the revolution against the supremacy of men, who has preached the gospel of revolt, who has been the central figure in many tumultuous scenes, who has defied the strongest Government of England, who has terrorised ministers, who has been imprisoned many times, who has braved dangers too perilous for those of her own sex, who has organised a vast body of women animated with a desperate desire to attain a political ideal, who has a strange mesmeric influence over many men, as well as thousands of women, and whose name is ridiculed, hated, feared or admired by every English-speaking citizen.

Raymond Fraquet, dramatist, gave a swift glance at this remarkable woman, and saw that she was a middle-aged lady with grey hair, a plain tired face, made almost beautiful by a long, sensitive, rather tender mouth, and by luminous haunting eyes. Then he saw that in the same room was another woman—or rather a young girl—with a fresh complexion, a square little chin, a nose slightly *retroussé*, brown hair looped over the ears, and a low square forehead with determined eyebrows. The elder woman was sitting in a cane chair by the fireside, the younger one was at a big desk littered with paper, and Fraquet knew that he was in the presence of the mother and daughter who have fought the strange and terrible fight for what they imagine to be the liberty of women, which has led to so many scenes of tumult and passion.

The elder woman had Raymond's card in her hand, and as he came in she rose and smiled at him with a rather sweet womanly smile, and said:

"We know your wife very well, Mr. Fraquet. She is one of our new recruits, but very full of spirit and pluck."

"I have come to speak about her," said Raymond, in a low, serious voice.

"Yes? She is well, I hope? Do sit down."

She looked at his white, grave face, and something in her eyes seemed to show that she guessed his trouble.

Fraquet took hold of the back of the chair and remained standing. He felt strangely nervous under that shrewd



gaze. He had come prepared to speak angry words in a high voice, but it was difficult to be blustering with this quiet, grey-haired woman.

"I have come," he said, "to ask you not to send my wife on dangerous missions, and to use your influence with her to—to—give up this militant work. I utterly disagree with your methods and objects, and Phillida is my wife. I think I have a right to intervene."

"I do not think so," said the lady quietly. "Mrs. Fraquet has a right to her own opinions and to her own liberty of action. Do you allow her to coerce your literary conscience, Mr. Fraquet—to interfere with your work and ambition?"

"No," said Fraquet. "I hold the old views that wives should be subject to their husbands. Do you deny that law of God and nature?"

"Oh, utterly," said the lady, smiling. "That is to say, I deny that the law has been established by God or nature. It is a man-made law in which women have not been consulted. That is our point, you see. Women must help to make the laws under which they live."

"Do you want to divide husband and wife?" asked Fraquet. "Do you want strife to be in the home instead of love? Is that the aim of your society?"

He spoke very bitterly, and his voice was louder now.

"Mr. Fraquet," said the lady, leaning forward a little in her chair, and grasping its arms, "you are a literary man. You have written many clever plays. You are not ignorant of the history of love, nor of the relations between men and women since the world was young. Therefore you know how many women's hearts have been broken by the cruel law of the wife's subjection to her husband; how—so often—all her natural instincts and desires have been crushed by the self-complacent tyranny of stupid men; how, throughout the ages, woman has drudged and toiled and suffered, and has been starved and cribbed and cabin'd in soul, because she has been utterly subservient to the desires and selfishness of men. That seemed to work very well in the old days. The tragedies were not heard of because women had no means of self-expression, and, indeed, most women did not revolt against their slavery, because it seemed to them moral and necessary and good. In savage tribes they still think so, and do not resent being knocked about

by their men. They suffer the blows meekly. Even in England, there are still thousands of women who hug their chains and hate the idea of liberty. But, you see, many women have now been educated. That was a fatal mistake of men to let their women be educated. Oh, fatal, fatal, from their point of view! But you can't put the hand of the clock back, and the educated woman demands two things—equal rights and liberty. Equal rights with the men, who will no longer be superior because she is no longer uneducated, and liberty of soul and body, of work and of ambition.

"As a literary man, you know these things. You know that throughout all history of literature this demand for the greater liberty of women has been growing louder and clearer. It began with the poets who had pity for women, for their passions and frailty, and it was expressed more recently and more emphatically by Ibsen and his school, who understood the psychology of the modern woman and her needs for a larger, freer life. You are a disciple of Ibsen. I remember one of your plays, in which the whole theme was the right of women to love, even against the laws. Why, then, do you go against your own creed?"

"Perhaps I was blind to the meaning of my creed," said Fraquet miserably. "I only know that I want one thing."

"What is that, Mr. Fraquet?"

"I want my wife," he said. "I want Phillida to be content with her husband and her home. I want her to be safe and happy, not facing dangers that make me shudder—going out into the streets to struggle for—for God knows what!"

His voice broke, and he turned and paced up and down the room.

"She has the right to choose her own way and her own life," said the elder woman.

"She has not the right!" said Fraquet fiercely. "She has not the right to break up my life and heart."

The younger woman—the girl with the brown hair looped over her ears—came forward now, and her eyes were very bright and full of sympathy.

"Oh, Mr. Fraquet," she said, "we understand. We know that you must be suffering, and we are sorry. But, you see, there has got to be suffering; there has got to be



until this thing is settled. I have been in prison four times. It was not pleasant. Believe me, it was horrible. And I have been torn almost to pieces in the crowd, and I have suffered every insult and indignity a thousand times. Mother and I have not shirked our share of the suffering. But you see we are fighting for a big thing, the biggest thing in the world—the only thing that seems to us to matter. We believe that all women will be happier if they gain the political and social freedom for which we are struggling.

“We believe that the whole nation, the whole world, will be better in every way if men and women are upon equality, and if the influence of woman has its full scope. And so, for the sake of this great ideal, this tremendous purpose, we do not shirk suffering ourselves, and do not refuse the suffering of those who will work with us and for us. The individual must be sacrificed for the general good. Even if some homes are being broken up now, and some husbands and wives separated, that also cannot be helped if later on the homes of all men and women are to be happier and healthier, and if husbands and wives are to be more closely united because the marriage had been one of free will and equal rights. It is difficult to avoid platform oratory—I have made so many speeches! But I want to be simple and sincere—and this is what this struggle for the franchise means. That is what this Union stands for. And that is why your wife is working for us and ready to suffer. Do you understand? Do you not see?”

“I see that you are a child,” said Fraquet. “I see that at the bottom of this movement there are forces which will destroy society. And I see that when ladies like your mother, and girls like you, get hold of simple, innocent, high-spirited women like my poor wife, then God help the husbands!” He turned away and went to the door. “Good-afternoon,” he said stiffly. “I am sorry to have troubled you. It was quite futile.”

It was absolutely futile, and Raymond Fraquet found himself up against something much harder than a brick wall—the strong will of a woman, who also happened to be his wife. It was her merriment which exasperated him most. If she had wept when he was fierce with her, he would have regarded it as a sign of grace; but she laughed at him. If she had been stirred to passion by his sarcasm, by his deliberately cruel words, by his white-hot anger, he

would have had a certain consolation ; but she was always quite cold and calm before his stormiest outbursts, and answered by a few light words, as though the subject were not worth arguing. It was only rarely now that she would argue or even state her case. "It is useless," she said. "We are at opposite poles." But once, when he taunted her with forsaking her home and neglecting her husband, she turned on him.

"Raymond," she said, "I will not remind you how often I have sat in loneliness, how often I have clasped the mantelpiece and put my face down on my hands and cried salt tears of weariness and hopelessness while you were thinking, thinking, writing, writing, happy and self-absorbed, and excited by your own imagination, behind the study door. It is my turn now."

When he protested that she was wrecking his life and going into dangers which would end in tragedy, she said :

"That is what the Romans said when their Christian women proclaimed their faith. It was very sad for a poor Roman husband when his wife went singing into the arena where the lions were howling. The wife, poor soul ! had to do her duty according to the faith that was in her. She did not like it, you understand." Then she clasped her hands about her husband's arm, and said, "Raymond, be kind to me. Help me to be brave in this cause. Do not tempt the cowardice that is in me, my dear, or my love of comfort."

Phillida must have coerced her cowardice and denied her love of comfort, for she did many reckless and disagreeable things beyond selling the papers of her cause on the kerbstone.

The greatest shock Fraquet had in his life was when he received a telegram from his wife, saying :

"I am going with a deputation to-night to the House of Commons. It is a great honour to be chosen. If I am arrested, be in court to-morrow. All my love."

"God in heaven !" said Raymond Fraquet, letting the pink slip of paper fall to the ground. "How long am I to be tortured like this ? What am I to do with this woman ?"

He trembled so violently and his face was so damp with a cold sweat, that he poured himself out half a glass full of whisky and drank it neat.



An hour later he stood in a tumultuous crowd in Westminster Square. Thousands of people, low-class ruffians, and hooligan boys, and city clerks, and respectable middle-class men, and noisy factory girls, were being driven back down Victoria Street and up Whitehall, and away from all the approaches to Parliament by dense bodies of constables and patrols of mounted police. It seemed to Fraquet that there must have been almost as many police as people; but in sheer high spirits, and with hootings and booings, and shrieks and cheers, the crowd struggled and fought and pushed and surged to keep their positions in the square. Every now and then they broke up a police cordon, one or two policemen were badly handled, one or two hooligans had their heads bashed, and two young pick-pockets were marched off to the jeers of the mob; but, for the most part, there was good humour on both sides. The mounted police were the masters of the situation, and wherever they rode, with carefully plunging horses, the crowd fell away or fell tumbling over each other, to escape from those dancing hoofs.

Raymond Fraquet himself fought in a wild, feverish way, possessed by a horrible sense of fear, to prevent himself being trampled upon or crushed to death. Once he thrust himself back from a horse's flanks. Once a horse pranced up and its fore-feet went over his head and down again the other side. He was forced this way and that by the tremendous pressure of the mob, powerless as a feather in a mill-race, and borne hither and thither by the ebb and flow of this human tide. Then he found himself in Victoria Street below Westminster Hospital and behind four lines of constables. They had gained the victory, and all was quiet in Westminster Square. They had found a mob and they had made a desert. An army of police, three thousand strong, guarded the four sides of this hollow square, and kept back the dense masses of people in the street converging upon the two Houses. It was as though London were in revolution, and that the forces of authority were prepared to resist the attack of an armed multitude.

This thought seemed to come to many people in the crowd. Fraquet overheard derisive words about the enormous force of police.

"Gord's truth!" said a hoarse voice over his shoulder. "There's enough bleedin' beables 'ere to keep back a cavalry charge! And oo's agoin' to attack 'em? Why, thirteen



little lidies as one could sweep away with my old 'ooman's 'arth-brush ! ”

“ And why don't the blimy Prime Minister receive 'em politely, and say, ' Good-evenin', lidies. Glad to see yer, and I 'ope you're well ? ' I 'spose 'e's too busy apickin' his teeth after dinner.”

“ Turn the 'ose on 'em, I would,” said another man. “ Lord love yer, a little wetting would damp their spirits, and make 'em look silly.”

Behind Fraquet and around him and far beyond him, on the other side of the square, there was the hoarse murmuring noise of a great mob, above which there rose the shrill laughter of factory girls, the whistles and cat-calls of hooligan boys, the swaying and surging of great bodies of people. But inside the square there was a deep silence, broken only by the klip-klop of a horse's hoofs as a mounted officer rode along the lines. The light from many electric lamps streamed down upon the broad, smooth pavement, and gleamed in the moisture of a rain shower which had fallen earlier in the evening. High in the black sky was the beacon-light of Big Ben, and all the windows of Westminster Hospital were illuminated by a greenish glare in which the nurses were silhouetted as they stared down upon the scene. On the steps of the hospital stood a doctor in a white linen coat and a number of medical students leaning against the pillars, with their hands in their pockets or smoking cigarettes. Behind the railings of the two Houses were a number of dark figures in tall hats and black coats, and some of them were gathered about a lamp-post on an “ island ” in the middle of the square of asphalt. They were members of Parliament secure and smiling behind their police defenders.

“ What have they come out for to see ? ” said a voice behind Fraquet, and another voice laughed and said :

“ Not a reed shaken by the wind, but thirteen silly women ! What fools we all are ! How they must laugh up their sleeves at us ! ”

“ They will laugh on the wrong side of their faces presently,” said the first “ voice.” “ They will never get as far as the hospital. The police will break them up before they get near the square. Then the fun will begin.”

Fraquet turned his head and asked a question. “ When will the fun begin ? ” he said in a curious voice, which he



would not have recognised as his own. "When does the deputation start?"

"They will be here in another two minutes—according to the time-table. Big Ben is just striking the half-hour."

Before the deep ding-dong of the great bell had eddied away there came from the distance behind Fraquet the sound of a sudden tumult, the hoarse roar of thousands of voices, cheering, booing, hooting. Fraquet dug his elbows into his sides, and twisted round, and saw that the great crowd right down Victoria Street was seething like a human cauldron, dense masses of men being thrust backwards and forwards by the pressure of other bodies surging in wild excitement. Some mounted constables seemed to be riding through this black human tide. Their helmets could be seen bobbing up and down above the sea of heads, and as they came nearer the noise rose to a wild uproar, horrible and awful to listening ears. Fraquet went white to the lips. He knew that somewhere behind those black figures on black horses, somewhere in this vast tumultuous crowd, was Phillida, his wife. He was sick and faint at this thought. His feet and hands and heart were stone cold. A horrible nightmare took possession of his brain. He seemed to see Phillida struggling, torn and trampled, in the midst of this rough howling mob. An inarticulate cry came from him, a kind of moaning sob. But nobody heard him. All around him men were pressing forward, swept off their feet at times, shouting and cheering and laughing. It seemed to Fraquet that he was in hell with the devils round him. In the windows of Westminster Hospital the nurses were cheering and fluttering their handkerchiefs. Behind the railings of Parliament were many more black figures in black hats. From the far end of the hollow square eight mounted men with a silver braided officer galloped across, the iron hoofs of their horses ringing upon the anvil of the asphalt pavement. The fun had begun!

It was really very funny when one comes to think of it, and as the newspapers described it next day. It was droll, for instance, to know that the deputation of thirteen women had been promised police protection as far as the House of Commons, and that when they arrived opposite Westminster Hospital the mounted officer gave an order to his men to break up the little procession and arrest the leaders. A trick like that shows a real sense of humour!



Unfortunately for Raymond Fraquet, he could not see the humour of it. He only saw the grim horror of it because his wife was one of those defenceless women who had volunteered, in their madness, to carry a petition to the Prime Minister through the streets of London. Buffeted about, with hard elbows dug into his chest, with hard boots trampling his feet, carried like a straw upon the human tide, he suddenly found himself in the forefront of the crowd. Those about him had fallen back, yelling and shouting, in a kind of mirthful fear, to avoid the plunging horses of the mounted police, and for a moment or two Fraquet stood alone, escaping by a hair's-breadth the prance of the officer's animal.

In that moment or two he saw his wife. She was the fourth behind the white-haired lady who led the procession. The light from a street lamp shed a white radiance about her face and figure. She was pale, but she held her head high, and there was a strange look of courage upon her face, and her eyes were bright and luminous. Then she passed, and Fraquet gave a strangled cry of "Phillida!" which was lost in the roar of cheers and hoots which rang out like the war-cries of challenging forces. He tried to run after her. If he could come up with her he would seize her arm and drag her away, out of the crowd, out of this peril. But he could only struggle after her, thrusting his way forward among the men who also followed, who fought quite fiercely with the policemen who had now drawn a cordon across the street, and were using their fists to force back the crowd. One of the policemen grasped Fraquet by the throat and shoved him backwards, half choking him.

"Curse you!" said Fraquet, "I want my wife. Don't you understand, man? I want my wife."

Then he ducked his head and dodged the policeman, and broke wildly through the cordon which had been broken up by the immense pressure of this crowd of roughs, and he ran free into a space in front of the hospital. The eight mounted policemen and the officer with the silver braid were just "breaking up" the deputation according to their orders. It was not difficult. If a score of Arabs had been against them they could have mastered the situation, and there were only thirteen women without weapons. There were also three thousand constables to reinforce them, and already the white-haired lady was being led off between two policemen who were like giants by the side of her, and three other women



were in the grasp of their opponents. But some of the rest were giving trouble. Five or six of them had seized the saddle-straps of the horses and clung to them, although they were swung in a sickening way from side to side, as the horses curveted and pranced as if to shake off the strange grip of these women's hands.

Fraquet stood watching with a cold horror creeping over him. It turned him sick when he saw one of the women lifted right off the ground and then fall with a horse which lurched and stumbled to its knees. The mounted man had saved the woman's life by bending over his saddle in the nick of time and holding her at arm's length. She seemed to be faint as he held her under the armpits, and her head drooped on her shoulder—and by the light of the street lamps Fraquet saw that the woman was Phillida. He stood stock still, seized by a kind of mental paralysis, so that he could not utter a cry or lift a hand to his parched throat. Then he saw a tall man come out of the crowd, stride to the side of the horseman and take hold of Phillida.

"All right, officer, leave her to me," said the tall man. "I'm a doctor, and I know this lady."

It was John le Dreux. At the sight of him holding his wife, a strange emotion stirred Fraquet out of his lethargy. He was filled with a swift passion of envy and hatred that this man should be helping and holding his wife. It was his business to do that. By God, it was his affair! He took a few hasty steps forward to go to Phillida, and then was seized by two policemen who came running to him. They flung him back into the crowd like a football, and the people closed about him, and then he was driven back and back down Victoria Street, by a double line of police cavalry and four lines of constables who would stand no nonsense. Fraquet could have got easier to heaven than to his wife.

## CHAPTER XV

THE inhabitants of that street of flats which Winifred Vernon, novelist, had nicknamed "Intellectual Mansions, S.W.," had been able to regard suffrage riots in the King's Hall, suffrage "raid" upon the House of Commons and other turbulent manifestations of the Women's movement in England, from afar. If, out of curiosity, some of the professional men and women in these mansions cared to go to Westminster Square on a night when such a demonstration was to take place, it was entirely their own fault if they were roughly handled in the crowd, if they had their toes trampled upon, or if they lost some of their hairpins.

The quieter souls—men and women who conceived six-shilling novels in little studies, eight feet by ten, who wrote little poems for evening newspapers (and for a publisher-patron of poetry who paid them five pounds for their collected verses which he issued with initial letters in the Celtic style, and tail-pieces done at so much a dozen by artist-girls in Chelsea), and the playwrights, painters, magazine editors, and essayists who lived by intellect and imagination unaffected by the squalid drama of real life—might take comfort in the thought that the river lay between them and the fighting-grounds of political and social strife. Yet they could not ignore such historic episodes as the march of thirteen women against three thousand policemen, which had been followed by the arrest of the leaders, their release on bail, pending a test-case in the High Courts as to whether His Majesty's subjects had a right to present a petition to the Prime Minister (strange and awful thought!), and by columns of comment in the newspapers.

As a street, Intellectual Avenue was decidedly sympathetic towards the women rebels. Phillida was not the only lady facing the park who took an active interest in the movement. There was, for example, a well-known actress who played the part of Joan of Arc, with her hair all hanging down her back,



in a *tableau vivant* at the Queen's Hall for the funds of the Women's Union. There was an essayist who wrote a prose-lyric on the young girl whom Fraquet had seen at the headquarters, and who led the fighting section of the Union. There was a journalist who had been knocked down in the great scene at the King's Hall and had resigned his position on his paper because of its change of policy on the subject of Women's Suffrage. There was even a poet—she was a girl of twenty and the daughter of a nonconformist clergyman—who wrote stirring ballads, sonnets, and odes, with such titles as "Liberty!" "The Watchword," or "A Woman's Sacrifice," which were printed in leaflet form and circulated widely among working-class girls who used them for curl papers.

On the other hand, there were ladies in the street of mansions, and some men, who were quite violently opposed to the cry of "Votes for Women," and to the spirit animating that cry. One of the ladies, who had a small flat near the Fraquets, was the assistant-secretary to the Anti-Suffrage League, and made a complete list of all the texts in the Bible proving conclusively that women are inferior creatures, that they ought to cover their heads in public places, and that they should be utterly and eternally subservient to the will of men. Another lady, who earned her living by writing what are technically known as "top-shelf" novels, and whose name is always mentioned in a whisper by library assistants, wrote a manifesto addressed to "the Women of England." In this she pointed out that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world—it happened to get into the hands of a nursery maid who instantly demanded a rise in wages—and that the influence of womanhood has been profound and far-reaching because it has been secret and silent.

"Tact and beauty are the woman's weapons," she said. "Tact will enable her to twist any husband round her little finger, and beauty makes all men her slaves." To this philosophical utterance she added a postscript. "As I wish to be entirely practical I recommend my correspondence classes for Beauty Culture. 10s. 6d., six lessons."

Mrs. Augustus Brown, the celebrated novelist, to whose literary salon across the water Fraquet had taken Madge le Dreux, was one of the leaders of the Anti-Suffrage movement, and had a certain number of adherents and many enemies in "Intellectual Mansions." She got up a monster petition,



signed by many thousands of suburban ladies, praying his Majesty's Ministers not to grant the franchise to women, on the grounds that the sphere of women is in the home, that the duties of wifehood and motherhood are the first laws of her nature, that intellectually and physically she is not fitted for the struggle of the political arena, and that the moral dangers of granting the franchise to women would be appalling and irreparable.

As Mrs. Augustus Brown ruled her husband with a rod of iron, as she did not happen to be a mother, as her intellectual arrogance was well known to all those who had been to her salon, and as she prided herself upon pulling the strings which work many political puppets, her sincerity was derided by her critics, and several literary ladies in "Intellectual Mansions" wrote scathing little letters to the newspapers which they cut out and sent to Mrs. Augustus Brown "with compliments."

In this way Intellectual Avenue was excited by a controversy which could not be ignored by people of their class and brain power. But, with the exception already mentioned, they watched this movement from afar, with that philosophical, non-committal attitude of mind which characterises literary and artistic people in relation to contemporary facts. After all, to a man writing a passionate love-story what do these things matter? Women may or may not get votes, they may become Members of Parliament, they may wear wigs, and gowns, or even trousers if they like. What then? These trivialities are the mere ephemeral facts of life. Love, passion, the beating of human hearts, are eternal. Pants or petticoats are questions of fashion. To a man or woman painting a picture, working out the inspiration of a new melody, listening to the vibration of his or her own soul on the tremolo of a fiddle-string, following the quest of beauty through the magic maze of harmonious words, what does it matter if women fight with policemen or pull the noses of Cabinet Ministers? Such incidents are the little facts that feed the newspapers. They do not belong to the eternal verities of life.

Such, broadly speaking, was the attitude of Intellectual Mansions, not only S.W. but W. This aloofness from contemporary facts could not, however, be maintained when they came closer to the mansions, when ugly, threatening facts thrust themselves into the very front-doors of the flats,



and when some of the combatants in a political strife fiercer than England has known for years, came seeking adherents, throwing down their gauntlets, proclaiming their Right and Might, and generally making the devil's own noise within the very gates of Intellectual Avenue.

When the Prime Minister had risen on a memorable occasion at the King's Hall, and had said, "My lords, ladies and gentlemen, we are on the eve of a great constitutional, social and national crisis," he had been, as we know, seriously interrupted. But at other times, and on other platforms—from which all women were kept back by such lynx-eyed guards that a telegraph boy's coat and trousers were no disguise to a suffragette—the Prime Minister had conveyed the same news of constitutional, social, and national crisis to many great audiences, who cheered tremendously at the information, as though they liked it. Each member of His Majesty's Government, and each member of His Majesty's Opposition, on other platforms, and before other audiences, had spread the tidings of civil war, and every day, for weeks and weeks, the newspapers had put the word "Crisis" at the tops of columns in big, black letters of sombre and sinister significance. By means of this publicity, a good many people had come to believe that something tremendous was going to happen.

The people, taken as a whole, had ignored the "civil war" as long as they decently could. For a time they refused to credit the information that civil war was going on, or was about to go on. They could not see it. There was no appearance of it in the streets. They were inclined to believe it was another cock-and-bull story of the halfpenny papers, which made amusing reading, but demanded no serious attention. Honest citizens with small shops could not be bothered with it. They had to attend to business, and balance their accounts. Poor people found that it made no difference to their poverty. The out-of-works were still out of work, the hungry were still hungry, the homeless still homeless. This precious crisis did not make them less or more hungry, less or more out of work. It did not even give them an opportunity of bashing policemen on the head, or of jumping on their wives more often or more strenuously. It was all fudge, this civil war! For a time, at least, the people were as indifferent to it as the inhabitants of Intellectual Mansions.



But, after a while, the newspapers and the politicians had some effect. If you hammer a piece of wood hard enough you make dents in it. So the people of England began to get into their heads that the crisis did mean something to them: the honest citizen with a small shop began to think that it might affect his business. The poor began to have a dim notion, developing as time went on, into a wild, feverish hope that it might be a cure for poverty. The out-of-work and the hungry began to think that it might affect their stomachs. This civil war, announced in the newspapers for a month past, might even afford a chance for head-bashing, given a little patience. His Majesty's Government and His Majesty's Opposition began to call each other names, and that warmed up the people a little, and the friends of both sides who had a gift of oratory or penmanship, began to call each other names, and that warmed up the people a little more. Because, although they do not understand abstract questions, they appreciate personal abuse, which is an old and simple thing.

Then, as things warmed up like this, and the word "crisis" was printed in still larger letters on newspaper placards, so that they could be read by small shop-keepers as they stood in their doorways and looked across the street for any customers who might be coming along, the leaders of both sides began to be warmed up too, and their speeches grew hotter and hotter, until, to judge by their oratory, all the devils in hell seemed to be let loose upon this unhappy country, seeking to tear the vitals of the people, to destroy happy English homes, and to throw down all that was most sacred in our constitution and traditions.

One of these leaders was very warm indeed, and, when he came within a stone's throw of Intellectual Mansions, his words burned the ears even of the people who were writing novels and plays and poems and essays and following the quest of beauty. His character and style moved a descriptive reporter on the *South-Western Conservative Gazette* to a fine frenzy of eloquence upon the night of the speech in Park Road.

"He did not mince his words," wrote this young man, "nor did he cover up his meaning in fine phrases. His language was beautifully direct and simple. He called his political opponents thieves and liars and fools. He mentioned the chief of them by name, separately, and proved each



one guilty of theft, lies and folly. An educated democrat, with an imagination which caught fire at his own words, with an unrivalled power of sarcasm and scorn, with a sense of humour as sharp as a sword, with the poetry of a revivalist preacher, with the passion of an inspired street orator, he had an enormous success last night in the Park Road.

"The Hall where he spoke was filled with working men, and he played on them as Pan on his pipes. He made them laugh. He made them angry. He made them shed tears. He gave them the smell of blood until they saw red. He gave them visions of loot until the old highwayman instinct, which is in the heart of every man, made the hearts of those working-men beat like sledge-hammers. There was not a human passion which he did not arouse—religious intolerance, class hatred, revolt against authority, jealousy of superiors, envy of the more fortunate, discontent with their own lives, brutality, cruelty, revenge. The man was a dramatist, an actor, a poet, a preacher, a great leader of men, a genius. He held this great audience in shoddy corduroys spell-bound under the wizardry of his glowing words. Honest, hard-headed fellows for the most part, fairly content with their lives until now, with the English working-man's philosophy of "Live and let live," and the English working-man's conservative character, they were changed, for an hour or two at least, into wild Jacobins, panting for the blood of the rich, hot with hatred against dukes and gentles, enraged by the injustice which had made them working-men. It was a stroke of genius on the part of the great Cabinet Minister, that he made those men believe that if God had had his will they would all have been dukes."

It is something when a politician can inspire a reporter on thirty shillings a week to language like this. But it was unfortunate that one of the dukes came to the same hall in the Park Road during the following week. The working-men had cooled down a little by that time, and, instead of tearing his vitals out, they contented themselves for a short time by breaking up his furniture. Even this palled after a while, because the duke, who happened to be a good soldier-man and a cheery fellow, lit a cigarette, shouted out that "if they were enjoying themselves it did not hurt him," and reminded some of the men that he had stood a worse racket when he fought with them in South Africa. Then they settled down to listen. The duke was not an actor, a dramatist,



a preacher, a poet, or a genius. He had no gifts of oratory at all, but he had a ding-dong way of going for his facts, or what he believed to be his facts, and he was a hard hitter.

He hit the orator of the week before very hard. He called him a long-haired charlatan, a Scotsman—this was the worst thing he said—a plunderer, a fox crying "sour grapes!" a stirrer up of strife, and a party politician.

"My lads," he said, "he has come here with all sorts of fine promises. He has dangled before your noses all sorts of tasty bits, which he has sneaked out of other people's larders. He has put envy, hatred and malice in your hearts, and if you did what he has told you to do you would smash up Old England and make a hell of things generally. Then the Germans would come over and put things straight, and put you straight, my lads, and make you do the damned old goose-step to a German tune, played by a German band, and bleed you to the bones until you had paid over a war indemnity of five hundred million of pounds for the good of the German Empire. And very silly with yourselves you would look then, wouldn't you? Why, what is the fellow who came to talk to you last week going to do for you? Is he going to give work to honest men? Not he! He is going to give some of your wages to lazy devils who don't want to work. He is going to make a nation of pampered paupers. Is he going to defend the Empire? No; he is going to economise over the fleet and reduce armaments. In fact, he is giving an invitation to the Germans to take tea with your wives. That will make you look a bit silly too, won't it? You take my advice. Don't you trust a man who wears his hair long and gives you a lumpy feeling in the throat, and a red-hot feeling in your heart. He is a humbug, he is. I never found a man like that fighting against the Boers in South Africa. Those were the fellows who stayed at home and did all the jabbering, and wept tears over 'Brother Boer.'"

"Blawst me!" said a working-man, after this speech. "That there dook is a bit of orl right, he is! 'Pon my word, I didn't notice that other fellow wore his hair long! It do look a bit suspicious, don't it?"

This working-man wore his hair very short, for it was the doctor's friend, Bert Uggins, whose head resembled one of his own coco-nuts. Scissors could never get close enough to please him. He always asked the barber to use the clippers, and to leave little beyond his forelock, which he plastered down



with pomatum. It was no wonder, therefore, that he was filled with suspicion when the duke brought to his notice the length of the Cabinet Minister's hair. But there were other things which distressed his soul with doubt regarding his duty to his country and to himself. He revealed his perplexities to John, upon whom he called one morning at ten o'clock.

"Hulloh, Bert," said the doctor. "Nothing wrong with you, I hope. How's the throat?"

Mr. Uggins twisted his cap in his hand, tightened the red scarf round his neck, looked round for a spittoon, which he could not find, coughed huskily, and said:

"'Taint my throat, Doc', this time. It's me hinterleck."

"Your intellect?" said John. "Surely you don't make a hobby of a thing like that?"

Bert Uggins laughed hoarsely, and slapped his knee. "You always will have your little joke, Doc'! But I'm puffickly serious, and don't you make no mistake. I've been doing a deal of thinking in between the tater business. But I can't make things come right, no'ow."

"What's the trouble," said John. "And why do you call on me?"

"The trouble is this 'ere blooming election," said Bert, "and I take the liberty of calling on you, Doc', because I say to myself, a man who cures people's bodies should know a thing or two about their hinterlecks—seeing as his body and his hinterleck is like a barrer and a moke. Besides which, a gent as is not above taking tea with me and my missus is a bit of orl right."

"So this election business has been worrying you, has it, Bert? Well, what's your point of view?"

"Ah," said Bert, "that's what I can't get, or rather, as I might say, I gets so many pints of view that I sees both ways at onst, like a bloke with a squint. What I want to do, Doc', is to see straight. He put his hand on the doctor's knee. "Nah, look 'ere," he said; "tike them posters. They've been a-postin' up posters on every blooming 'oarding for miles around. Very good, some of 'em, too. 'Every pictur tells a story.' The Liberals got in fust with the paste-brush, and those coloured portraits of theirs knocked me. Every one of 'em was a fair knock aht! They put up Peers in their robes an' crahns a-'eavin' bricks at the working-man's 'ome, and each blooming brick was labelled Tariff Reform,



Protection, Privilege, 'Ouse of Lords. 'Strike me! so that's your game, is it?' I say to meself. 'A-smashing up the little 'ome, eh? Well, Bert Uggins ain't a-goin' to stand by and watch you do it, by Gord!'

"Then there was another picture of a Peer sitting on the back of John Bull and stranglin' him, till his eyes were fairly bulgin' out of his bloomin' ole 'ead. And then, again, was 'Ouse of Lords' and 'Conservative Party' in big letters on the Peers' crahns. 'Strike me!' I say. 'So that's what it means, do it? The people is to groan under these 'ere gilded lords! O'd John Bull—meaning me and my pals—is to be troubled by one of those fellers as never did an 'onest day's work? Not 'alf! Bert Uggins ain't such a fool as 'e looks!' Why, to stare at that there Liberal pictur-gallery in the streets gave me the 'oly creeps! A week ago I could 'ave gone and murdered a Peer as soon as crack a walnut-shell—and, strike me, I would have done it, too! Well, what 'appens then? The Conservative bill-stickers get to work. Then I fahnd my hinterleck was gettin' a bit twisted. Strike me pink, if those Tory picturs didn't go one better nor the other lot! There was the portrait of a fellah as might be the twin brother of meself a-raisin' his 'and to Gord, and sayin', 'It's work I want!' and, large as life underneath, I spelt aht the words, 'A victim of Free Trade!'

"There was no end of pictures provin' the other fellers to be the biggest swine as ever stepped. Free Trade is bleedin' John Bull to death. The Liberal party is wallowin' in lies. 'Take dahn that lie!' says a working-man an' his old woman, same as me and my missus. The Liberal party is a-ruinin' Old England, 'andin' over the working-man's wages to the furriner, and feedin' the won't-works on mutton chops, while the men as want work can't get it."

Bert Uggins was very red in the face. He tugged at his scarf as though he wished to commit suicide, with medical attendance.

"Now, I ask yer, Doc', 'ow's a man to know the right and wrong of things? I ask yer 'ow the blazes am I goin' to plump my vote? 'Ow am I agoin' to do the best for me and my missus, to say nuffink of the old country? If these 'ere picturs don't make a man's hinterleck squint like a boss-eyed moke, my name ain't Bert Uggins!"

Bert, in his endeavour to arrive at the truth—and also to have a bit of fun—had attended the meeting of the Cabinet



Minister, and the meeting addressed a week later by the duke. But these speeches had increased his perplexity. Because, as he explained to the young doctor, rather plaintively, if one calls another a liar, and the second man calls the first a liar, how is a plain, honest man to arrive at the facts? The only conclusion he can draw is that they are both liars.

"And I rather fancy you're right, Bert," said John, who was thinking the matter out.

Bert Uggins then expressed the opinion, with language entirely unfit for print, that what the country wanted was a man who would tell the truth to people desiring it, like himself, for instance. He did not want to be kidded that the country was going to the dogs if it was not going to the dogs, and he didn't want to be told that his food would cost more, if it wouldn't, and he did not want to hear that Tariff Reform meant more work and more wages if it meant less work and less wages.

"'Tain't as if I ken afford to turn a blind eye an' a deaf ear," said Bert Uggins; and he explained that things had come to a pretty pass as it was in the Lavender Park Road and surrounding districts, and if they came to a prettier pass he might as well bash his girl's head in, murder the particular policeman that he had his eye on for some time, cut his throat, and finish things off as comfortably as possible before saying "So long" to life.

"Give me a man as will tell the truth," he said, "and I'll vote for 'im if I go to 'ell for doing it."

Unfortunately John le Dreux was unable to oblige him. He confessed, to the coster's deep astonishment, that he was in the same quandary himself. He could no more tell where the truth lay between the statements of conflicting parties than he could say where Bert Uggins would go to when he died.

Having expressed his amazement in many strange oaths, the coster then confessed that the worst of all this business was the way in which ladies were getting at his wife. Whatever time of the day or night he went home, he said, he was fairly sure to find a suffragette in the scullery, or a suffragette holding his latest baby, while his wife washed up, or a suffragette seated in his own wooden chair, while his wife had her hands on her hips and listened with an open mouth to all the strange things related by the lady visitor.



"Has a consequence," said Bert Uggins, "my wife is that uppish that I shall have to jump on her stomick if I wants to call me life me own. It's 'Bert, you dirty devil, take yer boots off,' or 'Bert, yer lazy 'ound, git up from that chair and 'elp me with this 'ere kittle o' water. Do yer think we women ain't got any Rights? Do yer think we ain't slaved and drudged long enough for dirty drunken beasts? Well, you're jolly well mistook, my beauty, for at this 'ere general helection we're going to teach the men a lesson what they won't forgit in a hurry.' That's 'ow my girl talks to me," and trying the strength of his forearm, he added grimly: "I am a-saving it up for 'er, I am. If she don't git the biggest 'iding——"

There was another of John's friends who was seriously perturbed by the great Crisis. It was Percival Fitchett, the watchmaker and street orator. His oratory had been interfered with by intruders. When a Cabinet Minister was speaking within a stone's throw, followed by a duke, he found it difficult to hold an audience. He cursed both of those men in wild and whirling language. All his hatred of dukes flamed out when one of the breed contaminated the very air he breathed. But his fiercest words were reserved for that Cabinet Minister who had created the Crisis and had led the campaign. As Fitchett explained to John above the undertaker's shop one evening, this man was a charlatan of the most audacious and damnable kind. He had taken all his ideas from men like Fitchett himself, he had dressed himself up in borrowed clothes—of social democrats—he was posing with the most hollow insincerity as a reformer and a revolutionary, and he was fooling the people with false promises. All for what?

"For Power!" shouted Percival Fitchett. "The man's idea," he said, "was to make himself Prime Minister, and then he would put his finger to his nose in the face of the people and show them that he did not care a damn for them, and that he had substituted one tyranny for another."

"God!" said Fitchett, thumping his deal table with the ink-stained table-cloth. "It makes me mad! mad! It is men like this who betray democracy, leading them on by promises of reform to the hell of bureaucracy, and the servitude of a middle-class tyranny. They are the worst enemies of the nation—a thousand times worse than the dukes and the idle rich."



He beat his breast with his thin hand, and real tears stood in his haggard eyes.

"Poor fools! Poor old fool people!" he said. "If only they would be guided by one of themselves instead of following foxes and wolves! Weak as I am, ill-educated as I am, I would lead them against their enemies and show them the way to their Right and Might."

"You would probably come up against a policeman," said John.

That prophecy was fulfilled. A week or two later Percival Fitchett was present at a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square, with a little gang of his local supporters. He listened with a white and gloomy face to the speeches of the Labour leaders on dukes and Tariff Reform. Then he mounted the steps leading to the National Gallery, and addressed a crowd of out-of-works from Bermondsey.

"Enough of this canting humbug," he said. "We've had plenty of words; we want to do something, my friends! Are you tired of starvation and damnation in your miserable lives?" "Yus!" shouted the out-of-works cheerfully. "Do you want food and some of the good things of the world?" "Yus!" shouted the men. "Well then, follow me, my men! Let us go and take what we want. Let us show the strength of the People! Let us strike terror into the hearts of our taskmasters."

"Which way, young feller?" said a hairy man, who had slept the night before on the steps of Somerset House. He put a claw-like hand on young Fitchett's arm, and said again, "Which way?"

Fitchett's way was across the corner of the Green Park to Carlton House Terrace. He was followed by sixty men, and they stole a march on the police.

A flunkey in a velvet coat and plush breeches, teasing a tassel in front of the windows of a big white house in the Terrace, was disagreeably surprised out of a placid reverie by a stone smashing the window-panes before his very nose, and breaking the plaster head of a Greek faun at the end of the room. He was more surprised, and quite annoyed, when sixty of the dirtiest men in London, acting under the direction of a young man with a white face under a shabby bowler hat, hurled themselves against the front door, dashed down the area steps, climbed the railings, stood on the stone parapet outside the drawing-room windows and showed a very



lively desire to get inside the house, by hook or by crook. It took them exactly two minutes to achieve their purpose, and by that time the flunkey in a velvet coat and plush breeches had retreated to the coal cellar.

Fitchett had been the first to jump into the drawing-room. For a moment he stood looking round the great salon of the Earl of Barrowdale's town house, and then he laughed quietly and bitterly.

"This is how our taskmasters live! Here are the toys they buy with money robbed from the people."

He raised a light stick and brought it swiftly down upon the head and shoulder of an armless Venus, breaking it to pieces.

"Break up their idols!" he shouted.

But the men did not heed his words. They were staring about them in a dazed way, as though struck dumb in the beautiful room with its gilded furniture and soft carpet and glittering candelabra and art treasures.

"It's better nor 'Ampton Court!" said one of the men, and another, whose boots had left clots of mud on the carpet bent down and scraped up some of the dirt in his hands.

"Is there anythink we can take awiy with us as a little memento?" said the hairy man who had been the first to follow Fitchett. He stared up at the copy of the "Three Graces," by Raphael. "Strike me! They're fine young women those!" Even this derelict, who night after night "padded the hoof" like a lean wolf in the streets of London, seemed awestruck by the splendour of the room. Once more he grasped Fitchett's arm with his claw-like hand. It was to prevent him from slashing at a group of statuettes with the fury of an iconoclast.

"'Ere, draw it mild, young feller. You ain't a bull in a china shop, yer know."

"My God!" cried Fitchett. "Have you no spirit? What have you come for that you stand there like a flock of sheep?"

"That is just what we were astin' ourselves," said another man. "Strikes me we had better get out of this as quiet as possible."

Some of the men were already making their way to the window. Their ardour had cooled down, and fear had caught them by the throat, the horrible fear of trapped



animals, when one of their comrades shouted out that the police were in the street below.

They surrendered as quietly as lambs. Young Fitchett made a fight for it, and he was carried off on a stretcher, unconscious and with a bleeding head, to the nearest police-station. On the following morning John le Dreux, who had read an account of the episode in the evening papers, saw him standing in the dock pale and haggard, and bandaged about the head. In spite of John's evidence as to his good character, he was sentenced to three months' hard labour. The last John saw of him was when the warder pinned his arm and took him struggling out of the dock, while he shouted out wild words of damnation against society and the tyrants of the people.

The perplexity as to the right and wrong of things which prevailed among men of the Bert Uggins and Percival Fitchett class was shared in a superior way by the inhabitants of Intellectual Mansions, during this time of the Crisis. For a time, like the small shopkeepers and the working-men, many of them had ignored the newspaper "Civil War," and had been contemptuous of the wordy political strife. But gradually they began to have an uneasy feeling that the election was not an ordinary one, that something more was at issue than the victory of one party or the defeat of another. The speeches of the Cabinet Minister who led the campaign, and whose violent oratory was inflaming the passions of the people, began to trouble them with strange thoughts. Could it be possible that this fellow—who was something of a poet and something of a preacher, whose wit and sarcasm and richly imaginative abusiveness were unusual qualities among party statesmen—was really preparing the way for a social revolution in which even intellectuals must take one side or another?

Raymond Fraquet was typical of the effect produced by the Minister upon men of intellectual and literary temperament. At first he had not paid the slightest attention to the political "Crisis." With the deep contempt of most idealists and artists for the "Little Politicians," for their bickerings and blunderings and insincerity and inefficiency, he glanced at the headings on the news pages of his paper and frowned or smiled scornfully at their partisan fury, and turned hurriedly to the page of literary news and criticism of drama—from the petty facts of life to the history of ideas.



But sometimes, in spite of himself, his eyes were caught by a line in a speech of that Minister who had come to Lavender Park one night, and he had read, almost unwittingly, the whole flaming thing, from the first line of quiet humour to the passionate preoration. He had read it with a kind of breathlessness. He loathed the man who had spoken those words, with a contempt stronger than he felt for most politicians. This fellow was a little Scotch dissenter. He belonged to the narrow-minded clique in which the Nonconformist conscience and the Nonconformist cheques put a canting puritanical spirit into liberal legislation. But these words! these words! they were brutal, direct, sharp as swords, red-hot with a democratic spirit, rising to heights of passion and poetry, violent and full of force.

Fraquet read more of the Minister's speeches. They made him uneasy. They were not to be ignored or pooh-poohed. They were not the old conventional platitudes. Such words as these might rouse the people to action, they might alter things, they were really forcing a "Civil War" upon the nation, a civil war of ideas in which even Fraquet, who had held aloof from practical politics, must take sides one way or the other. To his deep astonishment he realised that this Minister was putting forward as a definite political programme some of the very ideas which Fraquet, dramatist and essayist, had conceived in his silent study—revolutionary ideas, destructive ideas, ideas for the reshaping of society, for the greater happiness of the greater number, and for the overthrow of the old traditions of caste and privilege and tyranny. It was strange! it was strange!

Fraquet could not bring himself to break his habit of aloofness from the practical affairs of life. He could not enter the political arena. But he watched and wondered and waited to see how things would work out.

Other men of letters in "Intellectual Mansions, S.W.," and W. had a similar psychological experience. They realised that the ideas they had discussed in academical debate, and advocated in plays and novels and leading articles, were being used as political weapons, were getting about among the people in taprooms and political clubs, were the warp and woof of that glowing texture of oratory which fell from the lips of the Scottish Minister. They, too, were uneasy, like Fraquet. Now that their ideas might be converted into action, some of them were nervous and almost



afraid. They saw the shadows of approaching perils. Their quick imaginations saw far ahead, and they had visions of a social upheaval in which they might go down like the intellectuals of France in the great Revolution.

The literary Member of Parliament whom Madge had heard one night at Mrs. Augustus Brown's, lecturing at a *Louis Quinze* table to a crowd of wealthy and well-dressed people on the subject of socialism, changed his theories a little, and manufactured a new brand of socialism of his own, in which everybody was to belong to the respectable middle-class, with land of their own, and motor-cars and things. Other novelists burnt their boats as it were (though none of them had the idea of burning their novels), and jumped into the midstream of a political tide. One well-known novelist called a meeting of the painters and decorators who were doing up his suburban house, invited the London Press, and delivered an impassioned address on liberty, which was fully reported in the next day's papers. Two or three others issued manifestoes to their readers, and on the strength of this the heading of "Novelists as Politicians" appeared in several journals.

But, as a whole, Intellectual Mansions were filled with perplexed people who took no active part in practical politics, and who regarded the Crisis as a great nuisance. They still kept burning the little flame of their imagination, still worshipped at the shrine of Art, but with despondent hearts. To their surprise and sorrow they began to find that when things really begin to happen they are apt to be thrust on one side, as having no relation with the real and vital things of life. They provided the decorative effects but not the essentials. Those things which seemed to them to matter most seemed to the big, bullying, blustering world to matter least, to matter not at all. As the political strife grew louder and more threatening as the election drew nearer, a gloomy feeling pervaded Intellectual Mansions. The novels of the novelists did not sell, the dramas of the dramatists were played to half-empty theatres. The light fanciful articles of young writers with a sense of style and a touch of mysticism were rejected by newspaper editors for hard-headed articles on Protection in Germany, Land Taxation and the Privilege of the Peers.

Winifred Vernon, author of "Sweetheart and I," summed up the situation in her sprightly way when she said:

"Good lord, my dear, we shall be reduced to taking in

each other's washing." And Raymond Fraquet, dramatist, was typical of other literary men in Intellectual Mansions during this time of Crisis when he stared moodily at a grocer's bill and said :

"What fools we are ! The public don't care a curse whether we live or die. Literature, art, drama ? What damned nonsense it all is ! "



## CHAPTER XVI

RAYMOND FRAQUET had got home an hour later than his wife after the scene in Parliament Square, and it was with an extraordinary sensation of gladness, rage, humiliation and bitterness, that he found her sitting in the drawing-room, where one little electric lamp glowed with a dim red light, and where in a dark corner John sat on the wooden coal-scuttle with his back against the fireplace. Neither of them were talking. Phillida was on the sofa, lying back a little with her head against a cushion. It had seemed to Fraquet then that this silence between his wife and the doctor was suspicious, objectionable, an insult even to himself. It suggested an intimacy so complete that words were not needed between them. As a dramatist he knew the significance of silence between a man and woman. Neither stirred as he came in. But Phillida said quietly:

"Is that you, Raymond?"

"Yes, it is I," he said.

He stood for a moment in the middle of the dimly lighted room, white-faced and frowning, with his hands clenching and unclenching nervously. Then he turned to the doctor.

"It is good of you to take such care of my wife. In the streets it does not seem my privilege to protect her from those perils which she invites so recklessly, and against my wish. But in my own house I may be permitted to look after her without a professional attendant—that is, if she has not been seriously hurt."

His words were perfectly polite. But in the careful phrasing of them, in the cold voice which spoke them, there was obvious irony and resentment.

John got up from the coal-scuttle. "Yes. There is no need of me now. I was very lucky in being of some assistance to Mrs. Fraquet. It was a rough-and-tumble crowd, and a dangerous game."

He stood before Fraquet's wife. "Too dangerous," he

said. "I hope you will not take such risks again. As a medical man, I strongly advise rest and quiet, Mrs. Fraquet."

He was smiling as he took her hand, and his professional manner was obviously assumed.

"You have been very good," said Mrs. Fraquet.

She spoke the words in a low voice, though not too low for her husband to hear, for his senses were alert to hear and see the slightest sign which would reveal the meaning of this friendship between his wife and the doctor. He heard the little thrill in her voice as she spoke the words, and saw that her face had crimsoned for a moment, unless his eyes were deceived by the red glow of the electric lamp.

"Well, good-bye," said the doctor. "I can find my way out. Don't trouble, Fraquet."

The husband and wife were silent until the door shut. Then Phillida said:

"What's the matter, Raymond?"

"I don't know," said Fraquet. "God alone knows what's the matter!"

"You are upset, or something," said Mrs. Fraquet, after a slight pause.

Fraquet laughed bitterly. "There is no reason for me to be upset, is there? No earthly reason! It is the most natural thing in the world for a husband to watch his wife charged by mounted cavalry and clinging to the saddle strap of a plunging horse in a howling mob. That is only one of the little amusements of modern women!"

"Anyhow, I thought you would be glad to see me safe and sound, thanks to Dr. John, who would insist upon saving me from arrest, though I can hardly thank him for that. It is a bitter disappointment to me. But I thought you would be glad, Raymond?"

Fraquet did not answer her question. Instead he cried out rather wildly:

"Who is this Dr. John? Who the devil is this man who takes charge of you, and shadows you in the crowds, and sits silent with you in my drawing-room? By what right has he made himself your protector?"

"Only the right of a brave man to shield a weak woman," said Phillida. "That is the right of every man, but it is not encouraged nowadays, and has fallen into disuse."

Fraquet put his hands to his head. "God!" he said; "save me from going mad!"



"My dear Raymond," said Mrs. Fraquet, "be reasonable. Be calm and reasonable."

Fraquet swore a frightful oath.

"Reasonable!" he said, flinging a chair down violently. "Curse it, Phillida, how am I to keep any kind of reason when you do these mad, these terrible things, when you torture me so in spite of my love for you. I could strike you in the face when you sit there and say 'Be reasonable!' I will not be reasonable! By God, I will stop this folly of yours if I have to lock you indoors."

She had gone to him to put her hands on his shoulders, but he seized her wrists and held them tightly, and his eyes were burning like coals in his white face.

"Raymond," said Mrs. Fraquet, "be careful. I warn you that if you play the tyrant I will claim my full liberty. Do you understand? My full freedom away from you, and from this flat, where for so many years I have been caged by you."

She wrenched her hands free from him, and, with her head high, walked out of the room. And Raymond, left alone, said:

"God! God! What have I done to deserve this?" and, sitting down with his head in his hands, shed weak tears.

There had been several scenes like that, for Phillida did other dangerous things as the election came nearer, as the women who were fighting for what they called Liberty became more desperate in their determination to strike fear into the hearts of the party leaders, and as the men at these political meetings became more furious at interruptions by the women. At their own meetings, indeed, the women suffragists found the tables turned upon them. At one meeting in a South London hall, where Phillida was on the platform, a gang of roughs stormed at the doors, burst them open, and, with dirty refuse from dustbins and dust-heaps, pelted the women out of the building. At another meeting "for women only" the factory girls and working-class mothers began fighting among themselves, and tore and scratched and thumped each other so that pandemonium seemed to be let loose, until the police cleared the hall.

That Phillida should be in the midst of all this squalor and perilous tumult was to Raymond Fraquet a nightmare which haunted him unceasingly. That she should come



home with flushed cheeks and excited eyes to describe these scenes while he listened silently and grimly, seemed to him a proof that she had been bewitched by some evil spell, for he no longer recognised her as the timid, shrinking, rather wistful woman whose beauty had decorated his home life. She was beautiful still—touched, indeed, by a new and strange beauty, which sometimes startled him—but she was no longer his gentle, quiet wife. She was a virago, and an Amazon.

Sometimes he thought he hated her. More than once he was tempted devilishly to go away, to leave this woman who tortured him by her desperate adventures, by her callousness to his suffering, by her quiet, dogged resolution, by her deliberate denial of all that he wanted—submission, caressing sweetness, wifely himage. He would find consolation elsewhere—where it was waiting for him, where a pure-hearted girl was panting for him, and ready to fall on her knees before him, to kiss his feet as her master and lover. He had but to say a word to Madge le Dreux, the sister of that man who dogged his wife's footsteps, and always seemed to be shielding her in the moment of peril, and she would go with him anywhere and everywhere. He was often tempted to say that word. Sometimes when he was with her, and when her eyes were filled with a strange, tremulous light, and when together they spoke of Phillida's new madness, the word trembled upon his lips. But always he decided to wait a little—to wait and watch.

He watched his wife almost like a spy. When they were alone together—and she went out more than he did now—his eyes would steal above the edge of his book as she sat playing or reading those hideous little pamphlets which contained the gospel of the feminine movement, and would rest upon her, trying to read the riddle of her soul, to get at the secret which had changed her. If she went upstairs to her bedroom, he would cross to the half-opened door and stand there listening, and straining his ears for the sound of her footsteps, for the little movements in her room. So he would wait like an eavesdropper until he heard her come out of the room again, when he would go back to his chair noiselessly with a guilty feeling, and pretend to read the book on the pages of which the words danced dizzily before his eyes.

In his study, where he sat before blank paper, uninspired, unable to write, he would often raise his head to listen in



this way, and, if he heard her go out of the flat and shut the door, he would start up and turn pale. If he had dared, he would have run after her and seized her by the arm and said "Phillida, where are you going? What are you going to do? Why do you hide your plans from me?" But he did not dare. He had asked those questions and seen her face harden and her eyes look at him very coldly and proudly.

"Why do you want to know?" she would say. "You always get angry if I tell you I am going to a woman's meeting or to work for the women's cause. You hardly believe me when I say that I am going out to tea or to call on one of my old ladies round the corner. It is ridiculous of you, Raymond. See, I am going out, and I cannot tell you when I shall be back again. Good-bye."

Answers like that exasperated him so much that he had given up asking the questions. But the desire was strong in him to know how his wife spent her time, the almost drunken craving to find out that she was planning dangerous adventures so that he might get into a rage with her and have a legitimate excuse for passionate protests.

Gradually, too, there crept into his brain a fierce jealousy against John le Dreux. A word, a look, even silence itself stirred horrible feelings of suspicion within him. He was certain that something had happened, was happening, or would happen, between his wife and the doctor. John's deference to his wife, and his quiet, joyous laugh, his watchful eyes, always turning to Phillida as she moved about the room, proved to Fraquet, whose eyes were also watchful, that the man was drinking in his wife's beauty and eager for the sound of her voice. To himself, John was always frank and hearty and simple; but Fraquet was not to be deceived, and he answered sulkily, so sulkily sometimes that he was ashamed of his own rudeness and of Phillida's momentary glance of reproof, with raised eyebrows, as though surprised by his discourtesy.

Once, when he came home in the dusk, he saw John talking to Phillida by the red letter-box outside the mansions. He heard him say, "Don't be too rash. For Heaven's sake be careful!" and then the fellow turned and raised his bowler hat, and went off with his long, lithe stride. There was nothing in this incident, perhaps. Raymond might have remembered that he had often said good-bye to Madge on the very spot by the red letter-box, and would have resented



any criticism of the ordinary courtesy. But the sight of this doctor talking to his wife in the dusk gave him a horrible twinge. It seemed to him damnably suspicious.

He said nothing on the subject to Phillida when he joined her, and walked with her up the flight of stairs to their flat and opened the door with her latch-key and let her pass in before him. She was in a gay mood, and told him of one of the ladies round the corner who was praying every night for the Liberals to win the victory at the polls so that her old age pension might still be paid.

"The poor old soul is scared by the picture lies on the hoarding," said Phillida. "What a shame!"

But when they were inside, Fraquet said, "Phillida, what is there between you and that fellow John le Dreux? I demand to know."

She had just put on the electric light, and she turned to look at her husband with an expression of deep surprise.

"What on earth do you mean, Raymond?"

"You know what I mean!" he said. "You know that man is following you about, and that he cannot keep away from you. I want to know if you are making love together."

Phillida put her hands up to her face, which flamed with colour before going very white.

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" she asked.

"I have the evidence of my senses," said Raymond, in a cold, hard voice. "The man's face betrays him. He is sick with love for you. And I am beginning to think that you accept his love."

"How dare you?" said Phillida, in a low voice. "How dare you?"

"I do dare," said Fraquet. "I will not keep silent while the man steals your love from me. Do you deny that he loves you?"

Phillida was silent. She swayed a little, and then sat down and leant forward, with her chin propped in the palm of her hand, and her elbow on the arm of the sofa. Fraquet then, as once or twice lately, was struck by her beauty, and a wave of self-pity, of something like anguish, swept over him at the thought that he no longer held the sole and exclusive rights to this woman's heart and soul.

Then Phillida spoke. "I think you are right," she said, in a low voice. "Yes, I think you are right, Raymond."



John does love me. It is good to know that. Thank God for that ! ”

Fraquet went as white as death. “ Phillida,” he said, “ do you understand what you are saying ? ”

“ I am saying something very simple,” said Phillida. “ And it is you who made me understand. I have gained the love of a good man. Is not that something for which to thank God ? ”

“ Good God ! ” cried Fraquet. “ Perhaps you will say next that there is no harm in your loving him ? ”

“ I am sure I do love him,” said Phillida quietly. “ He is a brave, honest man, and there is no harm in our love.”

“ No harm ? ” said Fraquet. “ No harm ? ”

He repeated his words in a pitiful way, and then suddenly flared into a passion and denounced his wife as a shameless woman, and called her a coarse name.

She sprang up, as if he had struck her across the face, and he was so alarmed by her look that he begged her pardon and asked her to forget that he had spoken that word, and only to remember that she had said things which had hurt him to the soul, and would ruin his life if they were true.

She turned on him then. Perhaps if he had not sued for pardon she would have gone out of the room with that white scorn of hers ; but now, at his cowering, she faced him with such a passion as he had never seen in her eyes.

“ You are contemptible,” she said. “ You make me despise you. You are the worst of all things—a hypocrite. Don’t you see that if I were to be wicked, if I were to do vile things like a vile woman, I should be justified by your own teaching ? Have you forgotten all your plays and essays and arguments ? I have not forgotten. I remember word by word all those theories and sketches for new plots and plays, and all those evening talks which used to frighten me when I was a girl straight from an old-fashioned country home and old-fashioned church-going folk. How you used to denounce tyranny—the tyranny of conventional ideas and morality as you used to call it ! How you used to praise liberty—liberty of ideas, liberty of belief, liberty of love. Why, long before the first suffragette riot you had pleaded for the franchise of women. You did not talk of the ‘ Vote,’ you took no interest in politics, but you meant the franchise of women’s hearts and lives.

“ I used to be terror-stricken at all your revolutionary



ideas. I used to find my pillow wet with tears as I lay awake at night, thinking how one by one all my simple old laws of faith were being destroyed, gradually, and insidiously, but utterly, by daily communion with the free-thinking mind of the husband I loved! I used to be afraid that if another woman attracted you, your easy principles would allow you to indulge in immorality without even a sense of guilt. I learnt not to be afraid of that so much, because I saw that though you were sentimental with women, they had no physical attraction for you. But still I thought your ideas dangerous and destructive, and at least tainted with evil.

"And now, what do I find? My liberty-loving husband is nothing but a domestic tyrant. He wants to chain me to a small flat, and to crush my newly awakened desires for a larger life. He hates me to have friends that are not his friends. He hates me to have any life of my own. And all his ideas on liberty of love were mere cant phrases, mere literary hypocrisy. I do not want love as most men call love. But if I love John le Dreux because he loves me, as an honest man, with no thought of treachery to you, I will quote your own words as my text and law, and mark innumerable passages in your plays to prove my right."

She had spoken swift, angry, and passionate words. But now, suddenly, she burst into tears, and groped out her hands and said in a broken voice:

"Raymond, be true to yourself. Be honest. Love me with a larger heart, my dear."

But he turned away from her, and went out of the room, and shut himself in the study.

His wife's words had broken up his self-conceit. They had stabbed into his heart like daggers. They had left him a wounded and bleeding thing. She had found him out. She had revealed the nakedness of his soul, and he hated her. There was a sad and miserable man in Intellectual Mansions.

There was also a sad and miserable girl. It was Madge le Dreux. It was astonishing how quickly she had lost the fresh and buoyant spirit with which she had invaded London, and how soon she had been disillusioned of the bright little hopes and ambitions which had made her brain so excited in the first months of her adventures in the new world. There were times when it seemed to her incredible that she should have been such a child grasping at bubbles and chasing



the flying skirts of joy. It was only a few months ago that she had gone to Fraquet's new play with a fluttering heart, as though a wonder world were to be revealed to her.

She had been to many plays since, and now she had tired of them. They were all so very much alike, and so unsatisfying, and, for the most part, so strangely unreal. The truth was, that the drama of her own heart was so exciting that the traffic of the stage seemed tame. Humanity still interested her, for that was the real thing, and she caught glimpses here and there, among the men and women she met in drawing-rooms and lecture-halls and concert-rooms, into hearts burning perhaps like her own, though not so hotly, and distressed with the little ironies of life like hers. She began to understand things better, to see in this seething life of London, some of the mysterious forces that lie behind things—the force of passion churning up lives in its tumult; of poverty, grinding lives to dry dust and dry husks into the dirt and squalor; of ambition, urging men onwards to get more wealth and more power, and always more; of vanity—the pervading vice of most of the men and women she met—of love which made good, respectable husbands, and good, respectable wives, and wives who ran away from their husbands and husbands from their wives, and broke the hearts of girls, and ruined the lives of plenty, and spoilt all the world for her.

In fact, she learnt all the obvious old lessons of life which have been written about in books since books were made, and must be learnt not from books, but from life itself as it is felt and lived by the individual.

If time is to be counted by heart throbs, Madge le Dreux had lived a long time during the past few months. For the witch hags of Doubt, Defiance, and Despair had been knocking, knocking, knocking at her passionate heart, until it was weary and wounded. When, two months ago, she had spoken to Raymond Fraquet in Kensington Gardens, asking him very simply and entreatingly whether his friendship was right and safe, she had suffered already some self-torture and agony of spirit. But since then she had passed through the fire and had not escaped unscorched or strong. He had said, laughingly, "Where is the danger?" and had held her hands and said, "Do not be afraid." But every day that passed afterwards had shown to her that the danger was increasing, and that her fear was justified. Little by little, as week followed



week, Raymond Fraquet became more unguarded, and broke down her own guard.

He had kissed her once on her hands, and her hands had burnt with the touch of his lips. Then, one night, or, rather, late one afternoon, when he was going, just before John came in, and when they had been talking in the half darkness before the light had been turned up, he took her hands, drew her towards him, and kissed her upon the lips. It was a long kiss, and she had half swooned in it, with her eyes closed, and with her very soul seeming to meet and mingle with his in that touch of lips to lips. Then she had cried out in panic, and had said:

"Raymond, Raymond! What have we done? It is wrong. Oh, it is wrong!"

She could see, even in the half darkness, that he was very pale. But he laughed, and said:

"Why, what harm is there in it? What harm? What is a kiss? A man may kiss his sister, and even his cousin, why not a friend, Madge?"

"It is disloyal to Phillida," she said. "Oh, surely?"

He argued about that. He said very sincerely and earnestly that if he thought it were disloyal to Phillida he would be horribly ashamed of himself. He would despise himself. But he was not ashamed. He could see no harm in it.

He saw such little harm in it that every time they met now in her flat, he kissed her quite simply, and, as a matter of course, sometimes on the cheek, but most times on the lips. And it was very pleasant, very beautiful, until at night, in her bed, Madge tossed and turned, and wondered whether it were right or wrong—right or wrong—right or wrong? With a little voice answering each question with wrong!—wrong!—wrong!

In her heart Madge knew that she was stepping into danger, steadily into danger, and she was often terrified. But often her terrors seemed to be imaginary, so that she accused herself of a morbid and unhealthy mind. For how could there be any danger in this friendship with a man who loved his wife so passionately and so devotedly as Raymond loved Phillida? During the past month or two his conversation had been nearly always about her. He had come half weeping to Madge, or, at least, with a haggard face and gloomy eyes to tell her about the latest escapades of Phillida, her latest adventures in the crowd. They had discussed



together the motives which led her into this extraordinary campaign, and the influence which had been at work to change her character so swiftly and so utterly. He repeated her words and his answers. He confessed to her how fierce he had been, how passionate, how brutal even. He had said, again and again:

"Am I wrong, Madge? Am I a fool, or a brute, or both? Should I let my wife take these risks, and stand by shrugging my shoulders?"

She had no sympathy with Phillida's ideals. She could not understand this cry for a vote, and she believed that a woman who could not be happy with Raymond for a husband—this brilliant, this tender-hearted, this pure spirit—must be wantonly rejecting happiness. Yet she counselled him to be patient, to put a check upon his tongue and temper, to win her back by kindness and pleadings rather than by protests and authority. And she saw, or thought she saw, safety here. How much this man loved his wife! how he pined to be in closer communion with her! how he was jealous of her! She could understand that jealousy. In spite of seeing safety and forgetting her terrors for a while, it hurt her to see how Raymond loved his wife, and sometimes she was stirred with bitter pangs of jealous anger against this woman, who dealt with him so hardly. Then, when she became conscious of that jealousy, all her terrors revived, so that she was more afraid of herself than ever. And so she went on, in a vicious circle of uneasy, restless, gnawing thoughts.

It was no wonder that she began to look pale, and that her dark eyes seemed to grow darker. It was no wonder that John used to say, "Madge, London does not agree with you. We must clear out. You quite frighten me with your pasty face and those saucer eyes." It was no wonder that the girls upstairs, Winifred, Patsy, and Bunny, used to say, "You are too lonely, my dear. You read too much and think too much. Come and talk and laugh and kick up a jolly old row with us." It was no wonder that Bertram Ordish used to say, when he met her between Monday and Friday, "Miss le Dreux, I insist upon your coming to spend a week-end at Bumble Bee Cottage. Two days in the garden will put some roses into your cheeks. Now, look here, don't say no, because I shall peg away at you until, out of sheer weariness, you consent. Consent now, and come."

After Bertram Ordish had asked her six times like this, she consented, for she was really getting too nervous and high-strung. And perhaps it would be good to get away for a little while, even for two days, from the danger of Raymond Fraquet.

Ordish was delighted. He threw up his cap and caught it with his left hand.

"Why, that is splendid!" he said; "splendid! As it happens, the Misses Winifred and Patsy have also consented to honour my humble domicile this week-end, so, if you have no objection to their company, we will have a merry party. Intellectual Mansions shall be entertained in Arcadia."

Madge laughed. She had not laughed very much lately, but this cheery, boyish, good-natured, tall, big, eccentric man was invigorating and mirth-making.

"It will be exquisite," she said. "I have not seen fields nor flowers—wild flowers—since I left Yorkshire."

"Flowers?" said Ordish. "I will heap your lap with them, I will crown your hair with them. You shall feed on the sweetness of flowers—honey, to wit—and you shall walk o'er flowery meads! Is there anything more I can do for you in that way, dear lady?"

Madge laughed again for the second time in one minute.

"I should like to live with the flowers," she said. "Without the little worries and vanities of the world. Can you do that for me?"

"Nothing easier," said Ordish. "Say but the word, and you shall bloom like one of the flowers in my cottage garden, without a care."

He looked into her eyes with a smile, but behind the smile there was a shrewd, penetrating gaze which made her droop her eyes before him, so that he should not see too far.



## CHAPTER XVII

BERTRAM ORDISH met his three guests outside the nearest station to the Surrey village of Odcomb, and to Bumble Bee Cottage. But for the flourish of his hat, and his cheery cry of "Hulloh, this is sheer joy, dear ladies!" they might have mistaken him for a farmer waiting for the next train to the nearest market town.

He wore an old flannel suit, tucked up at the ends, heavy brown boots, a broad-brimmed straw hat, turned up in front to let the sun burn his face, and turned down behind, to shield the sun from his neck, and he carried a gnarled stick which would have done credit to Rip Van Winkle. He was not unattended. Round his legs prowled a sandy cat, with a remarkably long tail, and three small black pigs gambolled about with little squeals and grunts.

"Well, you do look a disreputable object!" said Winifred Vernon, who was the first to see him. "And what on earth do you call those creatures?"

She pointed a dainty lace parasol at the three small pigs, who were trying to bite each other's curly tails.

"I told 'em not to come," said Ordish, "but the little devils wouldn't pay the slightest attention to me."

"Don't you keep them in a sty?" said Winifred. "Surely you don't take them for walks with you! I never heard of such a thing."

"I give 'em a bit of liberty," said Ordish. "They like it, and I find them most amusing little pals. I only keep them for decorative and social purposes."

He whistled to them, and they instantly stopped biting each other's tails, and blinked up to him with the friendliest grins on their small snouts.

"Come on, you little black beggars!" said Ordish. He turned to look at the three girls who were to spend the week-end with him. "Good Lord!" he said. "You all look very

beautiful, but you really shouldn't have put on such delightful frocks. Before I have done with you, you will be in rags."

"What on earth are you going to do with us?" cried Winifred.

"Well, you'll have to wash up your own plates and dishes," said Ordish.

Winifred and Patsy were certainly rather too dainty for rough work. Winifred was in flowered muslin, with many little tucks and frills, and she wore a straw hat, with a great bunch of pink roses. Patsy was in green silk with a high waist and an early Victorian bonnet to match. Madge was in plainer style, having put on a blue serge skirt with a white blouse, and a big garden hat, in which bloomed a simple, dark red rose.

"You will last out the longest," said Ordish, looking at Madge with his grave eyes. "Especially as I shall make you a parlour boarder. Those cheeks of yours are too white for hard work; but I'll eat my hat if I don't get some colour into them before you go."

He got some colour into them before three minutes had passed, for he set off down a winding lane with such a long swift stride that the girls could hardly keep pace with him. The three small pigs trotted on ahead, stopping every now and then to blink back at their master, and behind came the sandy cat very solemnly, with its tail straight up behind.

Winifred suddenly stopped, leaned against a gate, and laughed until the tears came into her eyes.

Ordish also stopped, stood in the middle of the road, put his hat further back on his head, leaned on his gnarled stick, and looked at Winifred.

"Now, what in the world is the matter with that young woman?" he said to Madge.

"Oh, oh!" cried Winifred, laughing and holding her sides. "It's all so comic—those piggy-wiggies, the cat, Patsy hobbling along on high-heeled shoes! And it's exactly like Bertram Ordish!"

"Good heavens!" said Ordish. "Has Patsy got high-heeled shoes?" He took hold of Patsy's skirt and lifted it up a little to look at her feet. "My dear child!" he said. "If I don't cut those heels in half to-night with a sharp axe, I'm a Dutchman."

Patsy was overwhelmed with embarrassment, for really, as she had admitted to herself after the first quarter of a mile



had been covered, three-inch heels on green silk shoes are not quite suitable to country roads. Madge, as a country-bred girl, knew better, and had good thick-soled boots, which earned a glance of approval from Ordish.

"Never mind," he said, to cheer up the embarrassed Patsy. "There is a short cut over the fields to Bumble Bee Cottage. We shall soon be there. But you will have to look out for the bogs. There has been a good deal of rain lately."

He vaulted over a stile, and, with the courtesy of a gentleman turned his back to it while the ladies followed. Madge and Winifred got over easily enough, but Patsy's high heels and sheath dress were not designed for the negotiation of rural stiles. She gave a little shriek, and there was the sound of a sharp rent, followed by a new outburst of laughter from Winifred. Poor Patsy had torn a great strip out of her green silk frock.

"Whatever shall I do?" she said, almost crying with vexation. "It is the only frock I have brought." She turned with a pitiful reproach to Ordish. "You told us only to bring one frock."

"Why, that's all right," said Ordish calmly. "I could sew that up myself with a needle and thread. Come along, or the baked apples will be overdone."

He took Madge's arm and led the way across the fields. "Look!" he said. "There is Bumble Bee Cottage, perched up on that little hill, above the church tower. Do you see its red roof peeping through the trees? When I come from town I always like to get the first glint of that red in my eyes. You have no idea how fond I have become of the little place." He waved his gnarled stick to a belt of trees beyond the fields. "That's where we will go this afternoon," he said. "That is my enchanted wood. I have great adventures there. It is full of pixies and fairy creatures, and I swear I saw Puck grinning at me from behind a clump of ferns one day. And flowers! You said you wanted flowers. Why, my dear, you can walk on them, lie in them. Bluebells everywhere, violets under the shady roots, primroses like stars all along the bank of the stream. I have often wanted to see you in that wood."

"Me?" said Madge. "Why should you want to see me there?"

He turned to look at her, with his embarrassingly straight stare.



"Because that brown hair, and those brown eyes, and that wood-nymph look of yours, will go awfully well with the trees and the flowers," he said. Then he turned quickly and said, "What's the matter with them now, I wonder?"

A series of little shrieks and screams were coming from Winifred and Patsy, who had been left behind by Ordish's long stride as he walked along with Madge's hand on his arm. The two girls had deviated from the straight track, and were in the middle of soft and slushy ground. They were over ankles in the swamp. Winifred had vainly held up her flowered muslin frock, and it was all bedraggled with earthy water. Patsy, in panic lest she should be swallowed altogether by this bog, had planted her long-handled parasol into firm ground a yard away, and was clinging to it desperately while her green silk dress slopped in the spongy ground.

Ordish laughed quietly, a delightful, mirthful laugh, in which Madge joined, in spite of her concern for those two girls from Intellectual Mansions.

"Stay here while I go to the rescue," said Ordish.

He ran swiftly back, the three pigs dashing after him as if he were having a game for their special enjoyment. With a strong arm he hauled Patsy to secure earth. Winifred had already found a way out of the swamp.

"This is what comes of taking a short cut!" cried Winifred. "Look at my frock! Look at it!"

Then she looked at Patsy's frock, and laughed again, with her hands at her sides.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, "Patsy is a spoilt beauty!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Patsy, reddening with anger. "How am I going to spend a week-end in a dress like this?"

"It's all right," said Ordish cheerily. "It's perfectly all right. Fashions don't prevail in this village, and you can sit, walk, and play in your petticoats without a soul being any the wiser."

"In my petticoat!" cried Patsy. "I would die rather!"

"Well, that's as you please," said Ordish. "But how about those baked apples? They will be burnt to cinders."

They reached the little straggling up-hill village of Odcombe without further adventures, but here Bertram Ordish, who had been worrying over his baked apples, forgot all about them, because he remembered another part of the luncheon menu.



"Good Lord!" he said, stopping suddenly in the centre of the one street outside the one shop. "I have not bought those tuppenny tarts! What will the goose-girl say if I return without them?"

"Who is the goose-girl?" said Madge.

"She is one of the dear creatures in this fairy-book village who, for a few silver sixpences a week, looks after my bodily and spiritual comforts. Her real name is Sal Slocumb, but I call her the goose-girl because she has golden hair which she does up in a long plait, and because she cries 'shoo!' and flaps her apron whenever any chicken tries to get into the kitchen."

He turned to Winifred and Patsy, who were clasping their bedraggled skirts and trying to look cheerful.

"My dears," he said. "Do you think you could manage to bar the shop door from those unruly porkers while Miss le Dreux and I buy a few things?"

The two girls accepted the task, and by means of their parasols, poked the three pigs away while Bertram Ordish and Madge darted into the all-sorts shop.

"I always like the smell of this shop," said Ordish, having taken off his hat to a buxom lady behind the counter, who was weighing out snuff for a very old yokel. "It is so extraordinarily varied and comprehensive. The bacon blends deliciously with the boot leather, and the butter gives a softness to the kipper herrings, and, underneath the rather dominant aroma of the cheese, one can detect the more subtle essence of brown sugar; sweet biscuits, and mouse traps."

He bought two shillings' worth of tuppenny tarts, and, while the buxom lady put them into paper bags, inquired after the health of her new-born babe. Then his roving eyes were arrested and excited.

"Black treacle!" he said, "by all that's holy! I haven't tasted it for years! A galley-pot full of black treacle, if you please, Mrs. Hogg." He laughed with the joy of a man who has made a great discovery, and then became serious again.

"What an extraordinary shop this is!" he said. "It seems to sell everything that the simple heart of man could desire. Look here, I'll be hanged if there aren't some brandy-snaps! I never could resist 'em—never! Mrs. Hogg, I'll trouble you for three pennyworth of brandy-snaps."



"No trouble at all, sir," said the good lady, with beaming good nature.

Madge had the tartlets thrust into her arms, and Ordish marched out gaily with a galley-pot of black treacle in one hand and the brandy-snaps in the other. They found Winifred and Patsy desperately engaged with the three small pigs, who were endeavouring to force an entrance. The sandy cat was far up the road, walking with an air of dignity homewards.

"If our adventures in Bumble Bee Cottage are as exciting as those on the way, I shall have to give up the ghost," said Winifred. "I am getting too excited, and I have never laughed so much in my life before."

"My dear lady," said Ordish. "I am delighted to hear you say so. There is nothing so good for a soul as laughter. But wait till you taste this treacle! You will laugh then, for simple joy!"

So they marched in procession along the street, Ordish leading the way with the galley-pot. And old women nodded their old heads over close-clipped hedges, and said, "Marnin', sir! Marnin', young leddies!" And old yokels, sitting at their cottage doors, took their pipes out of their mouths, and shaded their old bleary eyes with wrinkled hands, and said, "Vine marnin'!" and small boys and girls looked sheepish, and grinned from ear to ear, and turned round to stare with round eyes as Ordish and his visitors and three little pigs passed along the white, dust-laden road.

So Bumble Bee Cottage was at last reached, and Winifred and Patsy sat down with a deep sigh of thanksgiving on the wooden seat inside the porch, and wiped the perspiration off their faces with little lace handkerchiefs.

Bumble Bee Cottage was almost more than a cottage. It was, indeed, an old, white, roomy house, with a red roof and high chimney-pots, and a good square garden enclosed by a privet hedge, cut into quaint shapes. Each side of the garden path was bordered by old-fashioned flowers, and, behind them, was a square lawn, green and soft as velvet, with a dovecot in the centre, and, beyond, a chicken-run, and the cleanest pig-sty the eye of man ever beheld, into which Ordish now clapped the three black piglets. And all round the lawn were standard rose-trees, and on the other side of the narrow path were beds filled with flowers, from whence came a deep rich fragrance, and the music of many humming-bees busily at work.



"Here you are," said Ordish. "Bumble Bee Cottage. A poor thing, but mine own. Come inside."

Inside, it was very good. The hall was also the dining-room and the smoking-room and the sitting-room, being a long low room with great oak beams stretching across the ceiling, and with a stone floor cleaned and coloured with red hearthstone and with walls bulging in unexpected places, and leaning aslant by the big wide fireplace. It was simply furnished. It could not have been more simply furnished. There was a tall and deep oak settle by the fireside, and a square oak table with fat legs in the centre, and a great oak dresser laden with white china on the other side, and an oak chest, and three or four wooden chairs with high backs and twisted arms, and a brass warming-pan, and a china dog on the mantel-piece, and many cheap vases filled with flowers, and one small bookshelf with twenty torn old books or so.

But the room was all so quaint in its shape and furniture, and the long window with the leaded panes gave such a good view of the garden with its green lawn, that Winifred and Patsy and Madge all gave exclamations of delight as they stood and gazed about them.

Whereat Bertram Ordish was as pleased as Punch, and said they were very discriminating ladies, and most kind to an unworthy fellow like himself, and he bade them make themselves thoroughly at home. If any lady wanted to wash there was a pump in the back yard with excellent rain-water, and a tin basin in the scullery which he always used for peeling potatoes in. As far as he was concerned he always washed straight under the pump, which was a fine old-fashioned habit, saving a lot of trouble. Then he called for the goose-girl.

She was a girl of sixteen, with a round fair face and flaxen hair tied in two plaits like Gretchen's. She came in bashfully, twisting her hands in her apron, and curtsying to the three ladies. Ordish introduced her gravely.

"Ladies, this is the goose-girl, who is as good as the fairy godmother. Goose-girl, this is Miss Winifred, Miss Patsy, Miss Madge. If you are as kind to them as you are to me everything will be delightful. Remember, my dear, they are London ladies. They have been brought up with most expensive habits. They haven't the slightest idea how to do a single thing for themselves. But they are very



willing and very amiable, and very charming, and I am sure with your assistance they will get on nicely."

The goose-girl got red, grinned from ear to ear, dropped a curtsy and then retreated backwards to the kitchen which lay beyond.

Bertram Ordish was a delightful host, simple, cheery, thoughtful, and not in the least fussy. He showed the girls their bedrooms—three little rooms divided by partitions and containing just one bed and one chair apiece, and apologised in the easiest way because there was no wash-stand or wash-basin. In view of this visit, however, he had bought three mirrors and tacked one upon each wall. He himself slept in a hammock in the scullery whenever he was honoured by visitors. He found that he slept like a top in that way, and it gave him a sense of adventure which was in itself quite delightful.

"But now for luncheon," he said. "I have a donkey's hunger, and I can smell carrots!"

It was an eccentric meal. Bertram Ordish was a vegetarian, his affection for animals being so strong that he could never bear to eat their dead bodies. Flesh eating, he said, was no better than cannibalism. But he had provided a menu almost exciting in its variety and mystery. He was, for instance, a great connoisseur of toad-stools and other fungus growths of innocent character and exquisite flavour when toasted with butter, and one species of large size which grew in the fields around tasted remarkably like Sally Lunn's. The leaves of certain wild flowers made a soup of haunting delight, and sandwiches (with home-made bread) of fresh and *piquante* flavour. Arcadia pie made of vegetable marrow, carrots, potatoes, turnips, cheese and tomatoes, all nicely browned in a hot oven, was pronounced by the three visitors to be a triumphant success. Ordish rose from the table and bowed his acknowledgments.

"But wait," he said, "until you have tasted Bumble Bee pudding. It is my own invention, and I hold the copyright." Bumble Bee pudding was very good. It was made of flour, potatoes, clotted cream and honey. It melted in the mouth of the company. It excited Winifred to indecent gluttony. She passed her plate up three times and quarrelled with Patsy because Ordish had given her a bigger helping. Ordish was as delighted as a child praised for some startling achievement. But he concealed his delight under a portentous



gravity, and an excellent pretence of modesty. So laughter rang out as though those four people sitting at the oak table and eating mysterious messes were children having a nursery picnic. Even Madge, who a night before had sat alone in her room thinking of her wretchedness and of her miserable love for Fraquet, forgot to be sad, and once, in a moment of self-consciousness, was quite startled at her own cheerfulness. It seemed uncanny that a few hours had made all this change.

The delightful eccentricity of the meal was enhanced by the charming unconventionality of the host. He had insisted, for instance, that Winifred and Patsy should, willy nilly, sit down to table in their petticoats, while their bedraggled skirts were being dried by the goose-girl in the kitchen. Patsy had resisted at first with furious embarrassment, but when Winifred called her a little fool, and when Bertram Ordish assured her that he had once taken supper with several ladies in their nightgowns, without any ill-effects on either side, she yielded to the obvious common-sense of the arrangement. This in itself was amusing and out of the ordinary. But Ordish kept his visitors in a continual state of amusement by the little customs and ceremonies which seemed to be part of the daily routine in Bumble Bee Cottage. After drinking his soup, for instance, he cut three large pieces of bread off the cottage loaf, said, "Pardon me for a moment, dear ladies," and left the room. The three girls heard him outside in the garden, whistling with a shrill and peculiar note.

"What in the world is he doing now?" said Winifred; and she left the table and crept to the window, followed by Patsy and Madge. With their heads close together at the open lattice they saw Ordish doing mysterious things. He was bending down and fixing the pieces of bread in a cranny in the garden wall. Then he stood back a few paces away and whistled again. Some birds flew down on to the lawn—blackbirds and thrushes piping and twittering in excited expectancy, but Ordish did not give his attention to them just yet. He seemed to be looking for other guests. In a moment or two they appeared from the door of a small out-house.

They were two big black rats, one with a very long tail, the other with only half a tail, having left the other half, it seemed, in some trap. They advanced very cautiously at first, stopping several times to blink at Ordish, but they



seemed reassured by his peculiar whistling, and then sidled along the wall, stood up on their hind feet, nibbled at the two hunks of bread wedged into the wall just within reach of their noses.

"Oh, what horrid beasts!" said Patsy. "Fancy feeding rats!"

"I think he would feed the devil," said Winifred, "if the old brute came in his horns and tail. Ordish's love for animals is perfectly preposterous. I believe he would have fellow-feeling for a flea!"

The subject of their conversation was flinging crumbs to the birds, and then he turned round and saw the three girls laughing at him. He seemed a little embarrassed at this, but came into the dining-room again with cheery words.

"Did you see those two rats? Fine old fellows both of them! I always spare a bit for them when I'm down here for the week-end. But I have to keep them away from the goose-girl. She shrieks at the sight of them."

"So I should think!" said Winifred. "I give you fair warning that if I find any rats, mice, spiders, black-beetles or other vermin in my bedroom to-night I shall have no mercy on them. I shall exterminate them ruthlessly with any handy object."

"Cruel creatures!" said Ordish. "If you would only cultivate a fondness for the animal world you would learn how devilish intelligent and affectionate they all are. But look here, you haven't tasted my mead yet. Brewed by myself and as good as nectar, though I say so as shouldn't."

Out of a homely black bottle he poured out some yellow liquid into four glasses, and rising from his chair, proposed the health of his guests, peace on earth, good will to man, and happiness to children and small beasts. Then, before drinking, he poured a few drops on to the ground in a solemn and deliberate way.

"What's that for?" cried Winifred; "and what an extraordinary person you are!"

"A libation to the gods," said Ordish. "An old pagan custom still observed in ale-houses though the meaning of it has been forgotten centuries ago."

The mead was so delicious and seemed so innocent that Winifred drank three glasses straight off without waiting, while Ordish watched her with an observant eye in which there was a glint of mischief. A little later Winifred began



to laugh hilariously and Ordish, turning to Madge and Patsy said:

"I am sorry to call attention to the fact, but Miss Winifred Vernon is decidedly intoxicated!"

"By Jingo!" cried Winifred, laughing still more mirthfully, "I believe I am, and had no idea it was such a delightful sensation!"

At the conclusion of this noisy and delightful meal Ordish said that washing up was now the order of the day, but as too many cooks spoil the broth, so too many scullery-maids break the plates. While, therefore, Winifred and Patsy did their duty under the direction of the goose-girl, he proposed to show Madge the glories of Bumble Bee Cottage in further detail.

He took Madge by the hand and said, "Gentle lady, vouchsafe to come with me and explore the little mysteries of this humble cot."

So they went together up the wooden stairs, and through creaking old doors, and Ordish explained the architecture of an Elizabethan dwelling-house, and pointed out to her with special pride the large number of store cupboards.

"A good housewife," he said, "would fill those with jam and apples and all sorts of good things."

Then he stopped in front of a door which he had not opened before.

"Would you like to see the nursery?" he said.

"The nursery?" said Madge.

"Yes, it's a little fancy of mine." He opened the door and revealed a large attic-room with skylights instead of windows, and the walls covered with Kate Greenaway paper. In a row were six little beds all nicely made with snow-white sheets and pillows. And at the end of each bed sat a Teddy bear looking towards the pillow.

Madge stared with surprise, and gave a queer little laugh.

"What is this for?" she asked.

"I like to come here sometimes and smoke a quiet pipe and think of the children I might have had," said Ordish quite simply. "You have no idea what a lot of fun I get out of those fancy children of mine. I tell them tales, and seem to hear their laughter, and have imaginary pillow-fights with them. Besides, when the holidays come I mean to ask some of my small friends down. My word! there will be some fun then! I shall feel like the Old Woman in the



Shoe—except that she was a bad old creature with a nasty temper."

He whistled a little tune, and strolled out of the room, and shut the door again, and said:

"Well, let's go to the wood and gather wild flowers."

That walk to the wood with Bertram Ordish and Patsy and Winifred, and the climb to the hilltop beyond, when they stood looking down upon a great sweep of open country flooded by the sunshine of a golden afternoon, and so quiet and so restful where the long shadows lay across the fields, and where village spires and red or yellow roofs peeped between clumps of trees in heavy foliage, gave to Madge le Dreux a feeling which in her childish days she had called "tears in the heart." She thought of the street of mansions and of London where she had lived six feverish restless months. Perhaps, after all, she would have been happier if she had stayed in the Yorkshire hilltown, in the country as beautiful as this, and as restful as this, though it had seemed so dull and wearisome. It was good to see the great sky again with the fleecy clouds scudding before the wind. It was good to go wandering through the trees picking blue-bells and primroses. And it was good to be with a man like Ordish, to whom every wild flower and every root and every little crawling thing suggested delightful fairy-tales, or stories of natural history which, as he told them, seemed like fairy-tales. He was very good and kind, to Madge especially; for when the other girls went wandering off into glade and dingle, Patsy ecstatic with the "colour harmonies" of the woods, as she called them in her Slade school slang, and Winifred swinging her straw hat by its ribbons and singing little songs to herself, Ordish stayed with Madge, and gave his hand to her when they climbed up or down the steep little woodland paths, and held the long brambles away from her as they went along the narrow way between the bushes, and ran a race with her and let her beat him, between one great tree and another, and then sat on the gnarled roots of the tree and prodded his stick in the soft peaty earth, and said:

"Let us rest our bones a bit. You look tired."

Sitting there, he was silent for ten minutes at a stretch, and with his hat on the back of his head, and his knees tucked up to his chin, and his big brown hands clasping his knees, seemed to be deep in dreamy thoughts. But presently he looked up and said:



"Pretty good this, eh?"

"It is very good," said Madge.

"Better than flat life, isn't it?" said Ordish. "Better than Intellectual Mansions, as Winifred calls 'em, what?"

"For some people," said Madge.

"For me, anyhow," said Ordish. "And for you, I think. You have been getting white and wan in the town. I have watched the colour creep out of your cheeks these five months past. I've said to myself, 'There's a girl doing no good to herself in this wretched restless life.'"

A good deal of colour crept into Madge's cheeks now. She was alarmed to know that Bertram Ordish had been watching her so closely during the past five months.

"It's good to get away now and again for the week-end," she said rather hurriedly. "You are lucky in having Bumble Bee Cottage."

"Yes," said Ordish. "It was devilish lucky getting hold of that little place. It suits me to a 'T.'"

He was smiling to himself as if pleased with the thought of his cottage and of his life there.

"Do you know," he said, looking up again, "I feel very much like getting married. Don't you think a wife would look rather well in Bumble Bee Cottage? Don't you think that would complete the fairy-tale?"

"Yes," said Madge. "If you can find one good enough." Ordish laughed. Those words seemed to please him.

"Can you suggest anyone?" he said. "Is there anyone you have in your mind?"

Madge was smiling but thoughtful. There were very few girls worthy of this simple, great-hearted, boyish man. She could think of no one. But she suggested two names merrily.

"Why not ask Winifred or Patsy?"

"I have asked them," said Ordish seriously. "Both of them. But Patsy tells me domestic life would interfere too seriously with her artistic ideals. Did you ever hear such rubbish? And Winifred——" he hesitated and did not end the sentence.

"What about her?" said Madge. "She would suit you splendidly."

"Well, I will tell you, if you will promise not to give me away. Honour bright?"

"Honour bright," said Madge.

"Well, she is head over ears in love with that big brother of yours."

"With John!" cried Madge, quite astonished. "Winfred in love with dear old John!"

"Yes, with dear old John," said Ordish. "With sly old John. With that deep old dog, John."

Madge was silent. She was thinking, not without a sudden pang, that she had been too self-absorbed to perceive those things which Bertram Ordish, and perhaps others, had noticed. She had been self-centred, and the only people in the world had been herself and Raymond Fraquet.

Bertram Ordish was staring at her with his steady grey eyes.

"Madge," he said, "joking apart, I want to get married. And I would try to make a pretty good husband."

"Yes," said Madge, "you would make a good husband."

She spoke the words bravely, but her voice trembled a little. She guessed what his next words would be.

"My dear," were Ordish's next words, "if you would have me for your husband it would be very jolly. We would have a good time together. How does the notion strike you? I think I have suggested it to you before."

It struck her in such a way that she went very pale, and said:

"No! No!" in a queer little whisper.

"Think it over," he said quietly. Then, in a half-humorous, half-serious way, with his lips curved into a smile, he set out the qualities which recommended him as a husband. He was very domesticated. He could make excellent bread. He was fond of gardening. He was no end fond of children, as she already knew. He was even-tempered on the whole, and when he felt that he must break things he had a habit of going for long walks until the feeling wore off. He had a great respect for women. He loved them all, even the ugly ones, and Madge was beautiful. He did not in the least object to her having a vote, though if she did not want a vote he had no desire to thrust it upon her. He had the most up-to-date notions about women's liberty. If he had a wife she could have any religion she fancied, any political views, and any fads that might please her and make her happy. The only return he asked was a little love, a little loyalty, and a few children. "I couldn't do without the babies, Madge."



It also occurred to him as a recommendation that he had strong views upon the marriage oath. "With all my worldly goods I thee endow." Most men took that to mean five shillings in the pound for housekeeping, and a little pin money. Now, he would hand over every brass halfpenny to his wife, and only ask for a little silver now and again to buy books and baccy. Beyond all things he would not want his wife to crawl to him, to suffocate him with "little attentions," to put her cool white hand upon his brow when he was suffering from headaches, due to bad temper, or to pry into his eyes to find out the little secrets of his soul in order that she might anticipate his slightest wish.

"It is time we swept away all that Early Victorian nonsense," said Ordish. "Healthy comradeship is the best thing for married couples."

He ended abruptly with a laugh.

"That's the sort of bloke I am! A poor thing, but honest. Madge, I think I could make you happy. Will you take me and make the best of me?"

He saw by the shake of her head, by the smile upon her white face, and the tears in her eyes that his words had been in vain. He thought he had hurt her, and begged her pardon very humbly for being such a cad as to speak to her like that when she was his visitor. He did not know how near he was to getting her consent. He saw nothing of the tumult in her mind while he was speaking. He did not guess that for a wild moment or two she was tempted to stretch out her hands to him, and say:

"Yes, yes, take me! Anything for peace, anything for safety."

He only heard her say, "You are very good—and I am very sorry. But I can't, I can't, Mr. Ordish."

"Why, if you can't, that settles it," he said good-naturedly. "I will not speak another word about it. Don't let it spoil our fun down here. Let us look for the two girls."

He took Madge's hand, and said how cold it was, and they went through the wood, Ordish crying, "Tally-ho!" until he got an answering shout from Winifred and Patsy, whom they discovered at last in a field of cowslips, horribly afraid of some long-horned cattle, who were feeding as peacefully as lambs. Not a word more did Ordish say to Madge on the subject of marriage during the week-end. He seemed to have forgotten all about it, and her refusal had left him light-



hearted. That night, in front of a log fire, he told the girls bogey-stories and adventures in mountain-climbing, and made puns, and toffee in a saucepan, until it was time to go to bed, when he lighted their candle and led them to their little rooms, and gave them each a "Good-night, dear lady."

Madge went to sleep early that night after only one wakeful hour in which she thought how good it might have been to be the wife of Bertram Ordish, if only she had not this torturing love for Fraquet. She woke once in her sleep to find herself moaning out "Raymond! Raymond!" with her pillow wet with tears. Then she slept again, and woke with the bright sunlight in her room, and with the fragrance of flowers coming in with the swift wind, and with a strange noise outside in the garden. It was the noise of a creaking handle, and of rushing water, and of hissing, as though a groom were washing down a horse. She went to the window in her night-gown, and, peeping out, saw Bertram Ordish, in trousers and a flannel shirt, and braces hanging loose, with his head under the pump which he was working with one hand.

Madge laughed to herself, for the sight was very comical, and very characteristic of Bertram Ordish!

At breakfast there was no embarrassment in his eyes when he greeted her, and he described with amusing exaggeration how he had gone out early to gather dead faggots for the kitchen fire, how he had overcome the iron will of the kettle not to boil, and never to boil, and how he had fried the breakfast eggs with an anxiety that made him tremble, lest they should burst their yolks, and humiliate him in the eyes of his guests.

So another day of merriment passed, and another cosy evening, and Winifred and Patsy almost shed tears—Patsy could actually show one tear on the eye-lashes of her right eye—because they had to go back to town, to beastly old town, to vile old town, after such delights in Arcadia.

Then, early on Monday morning they walked to the little station two miles away—by the road this time—laden with spring flowers. Ordish was going by a later train, but he walked with them, and carried their handbags slung together on his gnarled stick over his shoulder, and sang "John Brown's Body," in a good baritone.

But on the railway platform he walked a little on one



side with Madge, while the two girls were putting the flowers together more tidily.

"I have had a splendid time," said Madge. "You have been more than good to us all, and to me."

He did not answer her, but watched the train coming down the line.

"Madge," he said in a low voice, "promise me one thing."

"What is that?" said Madge.

He gave her a straight look. "Promise me that if you alter your mind about—about what we were discussing yesterday, you will not be afraid to tell me? If things get a bit too difficult for you—a little too dangerous, perhaps—you will look to me for help and safety? Eh? You know what I mean?"

She said, "Yes, yes, I promise," very hurriedly, overcoming a strange sensation of faintness and fright.

She did not know what he meant. She wondered all the way back to London what he did mean. Was it possible that he had guessed her secret with Raymond Fraquet? She could not answer the question, but was very nervous and afraid.

## CHAPTER XVIII

ON the platform of the rural station Ordish had asked Madge to come to him "if she found things getting too difficult or too dangerous."

Madge had remembered those words, and repeated them many times during the week that followed the visit to Bumble Bee Cottage—that merry fantastic visit! There were moments during that week when she had almost sent a cry for help to the man who had spoken those words. For she could not disguise from herself that "things" had got too difficult and too dangerous. She was face to face now with a difficulty so great and so perilous, that if she lived a hundred years there would come nothing so pregnant with good or evil. She had reached the great crisis at last. Everything in her life had been working up to this, and God or Fate had put a question to her soul which she must answer. Every fibre in her body, every instinct in her nature, every moral and spiritual, and intellectual quality of her being had to face the question and answer it.

For Raymond Fraquet had spoken the word which for many weeks now had been trembling on his lips. To the girl upon whom he had put a spell he had said "Come!" All pretence had broken down between them at that word, all their childish pretence of calm and faithful friendship. The man's passion had spoken to the woman's passion, leaping out like flame to flame.

He came round to the flat one evening, half mad, white as a ghost, with burning eyes, speaking incoherently, sobbing even, in a hard, tearless way. He accused his wife, and denounced her. He cursed her—for having ruined his life and broken his heart. He confessed that he hated her with a bitter, blighting hatred, and he knew now, plainly and brutally, what he had hidden from himself for years, that his early love for her had smouldered out, that her coldness and



lack of sympathy and utter antagonism to all his ideals, and to the very warp and woof of his character, had made his life with her a misery. Lately it had been more than a misery. It had been a living torture. It had been hell. She had flouted him, and derided him, and shamed him. No word of his, and no kindness, no tears even—for he had shed tears—could move or soften her mulish obstinacy. She had gone straight forward along the path of revolt, from one mad and wicked thing to another. She had dragged his name into the gutter. She had so broken down his nerves and spirit that creative work was no longer possible to him, and his genius was withered up.

Her last infamy had been the final touch. After that he could not live with her. For fourteen hours, dressed in the filthy clothes of a charwoman, she had lain concealed under the boards of a public hall. In the midst of a speech by a Cabinet Minister she had suddenly appeared before a great audience, in which were many of his own friends, and in that horrible guise, with disordered hair, like a street woman the worse for drink, she had denounced the Minister as a liar and a tyrant, and a torturer of women. She had been seized, and hit twice on the head, and thrown down two flights of steps. His wife, Mrs. Raymond Fraquet, as the papers had called her, had been thrown down two flights of steps! Never again could he live with her after that horrible exhibition of shameless womanhood. And, worse than all, when he had found her at home, a bare half-hour after this disgusting and appalling scene, she had laughed, with a kind of hysterical joy, and vowed that she had never been so happy, and never so proud in all her life before. She was like a merry girl who had won a beauty prize in a cotillon, instead of being a woman who had outraged the very decencies of civilisation.

After this tale, in broken words, Fraquet put out his hands to Madge.

"Madge," he said, in a low thrilling voice, "come away with me. Save me from this woman, this so-called wife of mine—but not my wife in body or in spirit—save me from going mad."

He took her hands, though she fell back from him, white-faced, and in terror. He covered them with burning kisses, though she cried "Raymond! Raymond!" in a breathless way, panic-stricken. He vowed that he loved her, and that



only she could comfort him, and make him forget. And then he said his most terrible words.

"You love me also," he said. "I have seen into your soul. I know that I have your heart in my hands, Madge. All these weeks I have known that I had but to say to you one word, and you would come with me. I say that word now. Come! Come, Madge! You love me. Your soul is waiting for me. I have seen the light in your eyes. Madge, you are mine already. You are mine. We two are husband and wife, before God and in truth. We have made a match together, Madge. If you were to desert me now I should really go mad. But you will not, because you love me, and because I say come!"

He held her hands so tightly that she could not drag them away. His eyes burnt into hers, almost fiercely, and he said that word "Come!" until it seemed to boom upon her ears like a low-voiced bell, haunting and compelling.

Yet she had tried to be calm, to reason with him, to argue the thing out. She must be sure that he loved her. She must be sure that the sin was not too great. She must be certain that the good would be greater than the evil. She was so young. She knew so little of good and evil. She could not tell what was the right thing to do. It made her afraid, horribly afraid, and like a child she could only burst into tears, and pray to do what was good, or not too bad.

Fraquet called three times—on three succeeding days—to make her sure that he loved her, and that there was no sin. Each time he seemed calmer, more reasonable, more argumentative, more persuasive and more enticing in his tenderness. And though he did not convince her, yet he broke her will down, and put his old spell about her so that she was unable to resist.

It was on these nights that, alone and sleepless in her room, she remembered the words of Bertram Ordish, and was tempted to send a cry of help to him, or to run to him, like a scared, panic-stricken creature, for safety. But she did not, and on the fourth evening she made her plans with Raymond Fraquet to go with him. Those plans were made with an extraordinary pretence, and even an extraordinary sensation, of calmness, by both of them. They turned up boat-trains in the time-table, they discussed what luggage they would take, they arranged when and where to meet, as



though it were all a simple innocent thing to do, instead of a wicked, unnatural thing, as in their hearts both of them knew. Madge was to take one little bag, she was to slip out of the flat at eight o'clock on the following evening, when John would be at his dispensary; they would meet at Charing Cross at 8.30 and catch the 9 o'clock train to Dover, for the night mail to Calais and Paris.

"Well, that is all fixed up," said Fraquet.

"Yes, that is all fixed up," said Madge.

"Till to-morrow, then," said Fraquet, taking her hands and kissing them.

"Till to-morrow, then," said Madge, letting her head droop until it touched her hands and his.

"Courage!" said Fraquet. "Courage?"

He released her hands, and put a clenched fist against his heart, and said in a whisper, "Courage! Courage!" It was as though he were whispering to his own soul.

At the door he said, "Madge, you will not fail?"

"No," said Madge, putting her hands up to her throat. "It is too late to draw back."

"Yes," said Fraquet. He hesitated outside the door, and looked at Madge with a strange, searching look. "It is too late to draw back."

It was not too late. Madge left alone, told herself that it was not too late. She knew that Bertram Ordish was in his flat, a block or two away. There was time even now to run round to him, and to say, "I want help—against myself. I am in frightful danger. How can I get safety?" And there was John, dear brave, kind old John. There was time to tell him—there was time to tell him—but no, he would kill Raymond if he knew. He would kill him between his thumb and finger. John must not know till it was all over, till she had gone from one life to another, for after eight to-morrow she would not belong to John's life, or to her own girlhood. She would be with Raymond—for good or evil.

Instead of telling John she wrote to him, and ten minutes before leaving the flat on the following evening she put the letter on his table in the smoking-room, under his pipe, where he would be sure to see it. At the sight of that old pipe, so stubby and burnt, so familiar in her brother's hands, she burst into a violent fit of weeping, though she had been quite dry-eyed while she had packed her things and written



the letter. She fell down on her knees by the writing-table and put her arms upon it, and her head upon her arms, and her body was shaken by the agony of her grief. Then in a few minutes she became very calm again, and with one long look round the old den, where her brother and she had sat on so many quiet evenings, she went out, and closed the door quietly.

There was no one in the house. The little maid had the afternoon "off"—that had been easy to arrange—and there was not a single pair of eyes to watch Madge take her handbag and go in a stumbling way, as though faint and weak, out of the little flat to which she had come so gaily with such bright hopes, six months before. So the flat was left empty and silent, except for the ticking of the hall clock, ticking, ticking the movements of eternal time as regardless as fate and time themselves, of any heart that might be broken at its ticking. John would be in very soon perhaps, and he would go straight to his den to take off his boots, and there he would see the white letter on the red blotting-paper. He would open that letter wondering a little what Madge had so important to say that she must write it to him, and he would read those words, written with a trembling hand, and blotted with tears.

"My dearest John, best and dearest brother that any sister had, I am going away from you to-night, and, perhaps, I shall never see you again. I am going with Raymond. I think I love him, though I am not sure. I think one day I may hate him because he has persuaded me to go with him, but again I am not sure. All that I know is, that he holds my heart in his hands, and that where he goes I must go. According to the world I am going to do a wicked and horrible thing. Raymond says that according to God it is a beautiful and glorious thing, because we two belong to each other in spirit. Which is the truth? My own soul does not tell me, and I am afraid to ask you, or anyone. Please forgive me, dear John, and ask Mrs. Fraquet to forgive me. I do not think she will be very angry, because she hates Raymond, and is very happy in the work which has put a sharp sword between Raymond and her. I do not know what I am writing or whether it tells you anything or explains anything. I will write again in a little while from my new life, and when the whole world is changed. But the letter will not be from



the same Madge. You will never hear again from your old sister, and comrade, and playmate, whose heart is breaking at leaving you without a spoken word or a kiss. The next time I write it will be as Raymond Fraquet's unmarried wife. Oh, John—John—John!"

So Madge had written, incoherently and wildly. But, as it happened, John le Dreux did not come back to the flat immediately after leaving his dispensary in the Park Road and, by strange chance, he never read the words in the white envelope on the red blotting-pad.

The full history of the reason why would take a volume much longer than this one to narrate. The first chapter would have to begin at least as far back as the Norman Conquest, when the Feudal System of England was established, and it would then be necessary to trace the economic and political evolution of the people, to go deeply into the long quarrels between the King and the Commons, to diverge into a closely reasoned study of the causes and effects of the French Revolution, to continue with a narrative of the growth of the democratic spirit in England, leading up to the repeal of the Corn Laws and of nineteenth-century statesmanship, and to summarise concisely but fully, all the known laws of the psychology of politicians, and political ideas. A chapter or two would also have to be devoted to the age of chivalry and to the romantic element in the world's history; and a somewhat extensive inquiry into the relations between the sexes from the time of Adam and Eve to the present day (with sidelights upon the feminine movement as revealed in modern drama and fiction) would also be strictly necessary for an accurate explanation of the reason why John le Dreux (M.D., Edin.), resident of the corner ground-floor flat of the street of mansions, failed to see and to read the letter left on the blotting-pad.

Obviously the history cannot be related in the present volume, but at least some few facts of recent history must be set forth. They deal with the great Civil War to which allusion has already been made. That strife had begun in the newspapers and had then been proclaimed on platforms, and by degrees had reached the small shopkeepers, and the city clerks, and at last had stirred the hearts of the great people, represented in this book by the solitary and sublime figure of Bert Uggins, ready to bash the head of his enemy or



to plump his vote for his champion, provided he could make up his mind honestly and without doubt as to which was which.

Now, the English character is such that when war has actually been declared, when the combatants are preparing for the first shock of battle the people feel compelled to take sides one way or the other. As soon, therefore, as the writs had been issued for the General Election, upon the issues of which the fate of England depended, Bert Uggins, and other men of his class and character, shilly-shallied no longer. Bert himself went bald-headed against the Minister, who had come down with wild and whirling words, with golden promises of plunder and loot, and with the most humorous and Rabelaisian abuse of his opponents. Uggins was ready to smash that man into pulp. Why, he did not exactly know, but somewhere at the back of his head there was a friendly feeling for the duke who had fought in South Africa, and who had said, "You would look rather silly with yourselves if German soldiers were quartered in your little home." Bert Uggins thought he would look so extremely silly that he decided to put an end to his perplexity and plump for the party which believe in the Navy and the Army and the Empire instead of the other party which had a sneaking desire to do away with all three. And in the public-house in the Park Road Bert drank many glasses of bad beer as soon as he had put his barrow to bed, and swore many frightful oaths at old pals who had now become his enemies because they were going to plump for the party of Peace and Plunder, and got into serious trouble with the police because pewter mugs had a habit of leaving his hands in the direction of mugs of another shape and make. Still he was enjoying himself vastly, was Bert Uggins in this time of Civil War.

In the street which ran parallel with Park Road—the street of mansions—people more intellectual than the coster were engaged in the difficult task of making up their minds one way or the other. Even the Intellectuals were drawn into this vortex of political opinion and found themselves between the fire of conflicting parties. Within fifteen days of the judgment at the Polls many of them by desperate effort detached themselves from abstract ideals, broke down their habit of aloofness from practical life, and became quite passionate in their political convictions. The newspapers were flooded



with letters from literary people proving that peers were the enemies of the people—or their most disinterested friends; that Tariff Reform was a menace to the moral and social welfare of the people—or the one hope of national regeneration; that the Liberal party was on the side of anarchy leading to the annihilation of the Empire, the overthrow of the Crown, and the destruction of home life—or was the party of Reform which would bring the tyrants to their knees and make the people masters of their fate.

On the whole the political parties were evenly divided in Intellectual Mansions, but there was a slight bias in favour of the Liberals. This was due not to the arguments of the Scottish Minister and his colleagues, and certainly not to the leading articles in the newspapers or to the pictures on the hoardings, but to the influence of the French Revolution upon the minds of people who were students of history and literature. In the small flats in the street of mansions the names of Danton, Camille Desmoulins, Marat, Mirabeau, the Girondins and the Mountain, occurred frequently in conversation. All the old ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality came back with those ghosts of history and excited intellectual ladies and gentlemen, so that they had to take sulphonal at night to make themselves sleep.

One well-known novelist, following the lead of other less-known novelists, issued a manifesto to the people in which he was pleased to call himself a working-man (though Bert Uggins would have jeered at him), and in which he made a passionate confession of faith in the supreme right and power of working-men (being an anti-suffragist he did not include women) to possess the land, and rule the land, and reap the fruits of their own labour, and to sweep away the lazy aristocrats who had robbed them of their heritage. Not Danton, nor Marat, nor Camille Desmoulins, could have penned a more revolutionary gospel than that novelist who proclaimed himself the "Friend of the People."

So the Civil War went on, and even a little blood was spilt at meetings where the excitement of the contending parties led them, in their love of abstract ideals, to hit each other on the head. Gangs of hooligans (the novelist's brothers and working-men) broke up meetings and furniture in the strongholds of their enemies. High-spirited youths of the medical schools and polytechnics sang the songs of revolution,



and let loose noxious gases in the halls where Ministers and ex-Ministers vainly endeavoured to make themselves heard. In many parts of the country many policemen—hired defenders of authority and of the privileged classes—had their helmets bashed in by the lovers of liberty, and in several provincial towns and London boroughs, working-men became out-patients or in-patients at hospitals, supported by voluntary subscription, on account of broken heads and black eyes. But although a little blood was spilt it was, curiously enough, the women and not the men who got the worst of it. In all these appeals for liberty and reform, in all these literary manifestoes breathing the pure and passionate gospel of Revolution and Reform, and the rights of the people to govern themselves, the women were ignored.

But, curiously enough, the women were not willing to be ignored. By some strange mental perversity they believed that they were suffering greater injustice than working-men who had their votes. By some amazing psychological freakishness large numbers of women were ready and eager to face the fury of both political parties, to brave the hatred of the mob patriots, to dencunce the tyranny of all men who denied the rights and reforms which they also demanded. And, ignored as they might be in political manifestoes, they could not be ignored at political meetings or in the arena of political combat. They were always there with their interruptions and their sudden appearances, and their scornful denunciations, from beneath the platforms, from holes in the ceilings, from undiscovered hiding-places. They hired their own halls and held their own meetings. Their words rang out just as boldly and bravely as the words of Liberal or Conservative candidates. With undaunted spirit, and with a pluck and good-humour which won many adherents, they carried on a guerilla warfare against the Ministers who were their chief enemies. These Ministers could not move without bodyguards of police, and even then were waylaid on railway platforms, and besieged in their motor-cars, and heckled on their doorsteps.

But the women had to pay. History tells us that the women paid and that the revenge was taken. They were pelted with any handy thing, and any filthy thing, which could be got quickly by men animated by a high ideal of chivalry. The women's platforms were stormed by the high-mounting



spirit of the mob, and they were roughly handled and roughly mauled until they fled in disorder. The women were flung down flights of stone stairs, they were gagged and buffeted and torn and thumped. And curiously enough these strange women, these frail girls, these white-haired ladies, these quiet, shrewd middle-aged women, came up flushed but smiling, still undaunted and still resolute in their determination to claim their rights.

Phillida Fraquet was one of those strange women—so strange that even her husband, a professional psychologist, a man claiming to know the human heart, could not understand the mystery which had changed a quiet, timid girl into a woman who faced peril with a laugh, who rejoiced in suffering, and who went with a strange and terrible gaiety into violence.

John le Dreux, in his thoughtful, slow-witted way, got nearer to the heart of her mystery. He understood more clearly the reason why Mrs. Fraquet had a clearer complexion, brighter eyes, and steadier pulse, stronger nerves, and the beautiful gaiety which was so terrifying to her husband. In his "pettifogging practice," as he called it, he had come across many nervous, morbid, hysterical and miserable women, and searching for the cause of their symptoms he had found always the same thing, a cramped activity of spirit, a narrow, objectless life, wholly unsatisfied by the little duties, the little pleasures, the long leisure hours of the middle-class, childless wife.

Lately he had had many conversations with Phillida Fraquet, and he had stolen time from his practice (rather conscience-stricken sometimes) to follow her into halls and meeting-places, to stand, not too close, but fairly handy, in big crowds, and he had marvelled at her increasing courage, at the wonderful way in which she had cast off her timidity and had become a strong, brave woman, not afraid to speak to a great crowd, able even to silence them by her simple glowing words, to make them laugh by her playfulness of wit, to make them thoughtful by little arguments put bluntly and sincerely to them, and asking for honest answers.

"My dear," he said to her one day—he had slipped into the habit of calling her "my dear" quite simply—"you are winning over the working-men and women—I believe if there were a thousand women like you the business



would be soon settled. You would have the people with you."

She was pleased with those words, and her eyes danced at him.

"John," she said, "there are ten thousand women—a hundred thousand, better and wiser and braver than I. But alas! there are so few men like you, so good to women, and so reasonable and honest."

She became very thoughtful and her eyes looked at him with a grave tenderness which he found strangely thrilling.

"John," she said, "this business, as you call it, will not be settled until many more women have been brutally handled, and until something happens, something rather terrible, I mean, which will shock the people of England into understanding at last that the claims of women must be granted. I think the time is ripening for that. During the last few weeks I have seen signs of increasing brutality. The men are wanting a victim, and the women are ready for the sacrifice."

John was startled at that, so startled that he became very pale, and a cold shiver went down his spine.

"Mrs. Fraquet!" he cried; and then "Phillida!" in a queer trembling voice, "you make me very much afraid."

She put her hand on his arm with a light touch. "I do not think the honour will be mine," she said. "I do not think I shall be asked for the sacrifice. But if so"—she spoke in a low voice, and her eyes were glowing—"if so I shall be very glad."

She spoke then of her husband, as though to make John forget those words, and said how strange he had been lately, how morbid and passionate and hysterical. He seemed to hate her because she did those things, and yet she tried to love him, and to be good to him and please him in all other things. She was sorry that this question had divided them so much. It would have been so splendid if they had both been working together in the cause, he with his brilliant pen and his quick wit, she in her humbler way with simple words and womanly service.

John listened to her with only a word or two of assent, and when he went from her flat that afternoon he took her hand and said:



"Mrs. Fraquet, let me be with you in any great danger. Promise that you will let me know if you have any fore-warning of a rough time."

She laughed at him, but as they looked into each other's eyes for a moment they understood each other.

"That is impossible," she said; "we are always having a rough time, and danger comes out of the dark suddenly and swiftly. You cannot guard against it."

In saying those words she seemed to have some fore-knowledge, some warning. For that was how the great danger came to Phillida Fraquet—out of the dark, suddenly and swiftly. It came on that evening when Madge left the flat to meet Raymond Fraquet at Charing Cross.

It was on the eve of the election in the South London district. The rival candidates were addressing their final speeches to the electors. Motor-cars, plastered with red and yellow placards were more numerous in the Park Road than costers' barrows on a Saturday night. They came plunging through the crowded thoroughfare with an apparent recklessness of human life, and with ceaseless tooting of horns, as though those who made the most noise would gain most votes—which indeed is a profound political truth. Parties of canvassers—men and women of the well-to-do classes—were going on their final rounds of a house-to-house visit in the constituency, rat-tatting on little doors in mean streets, waking up babies, making dogs bark, thrusting leaflets into unwilling hands, smiling sweetly at grimy noses appearing in a narrow inch or two between door and door-post saying, "Is your husband in, my dear woman?" or, "Mind you vote for the Conservatives; Tariff Reform means more wages and more work, you know," or, "The Liberals are the friends of the people. Vote for your own interests and your own homes."

One of the candidates was holding a meeting in a hall which was surrounded by an immense body of police. It was a meeting for men only, and not a petticoat of a member's wife or member's sister was allowed inside the building. They were even afraid of women who might have dispensed with petticoats and taken to trousers for one night only, and every face was carefully scrutinised by the stewards. A stubble chin was passed in quickly. A smooth, clean-shaven face aroused instant suspicion. Guarded therefore



from all feminine attack, the candidate on the platform was bluff and breezy and heroic. He reminded his "old pals" that honest William had always been their friend. He was one of themselves. He had their interest at heart. He knew them in their homes and at their hearthsides. And he could tell them, once again (with a fist well hammered into the palm of his hand) that Free Trade, the supremacy of the House of Commons, the downfall of the House of Lords, the abolition of class privilege and class tyranny, old age pensions, and a supreme Navy—"Ay, what about the Navy?" cried a voice, instantly silenced by a hard knock on the head—were essential to the safety and the happiness and the prosperity of those little homes in one of which, as a boy, he had lived with his old mother and his old father—God bless them!—just 'like' themselves.

Outside was an immense crowd who had been unable to gain admission to the hall. It was a mob of working-men and working-women, of city clerks and small shop-keepers, of medical students, and nondescript youths, and loafing hooligans, all excited by the flaming posters, the platform oratory, the conflict of opinions, the noise and uproar of the electioneering scenes which had made pandemonium in the district for a week. Strangers were arguing with each other, political debates were going on under lamp-posts, and in groups of human atoms gathered together fortuitously, and representing every crude political conviction hastily acquired during the crisis. But in the centre of the crowd, where the people were most densely massed, there was comparative silence, broken now and again by loud laughter, by jeers and cheers and foul-mouthed interruptions and an occasional scuffle.

The crowd was listening to four women mounted on a cart. They took turns to speak, and their voices, very clear and high-pitched, rose above the clamour and the hoarse murmurous noise of the great mob. One of the women was a tall old lady with snow-white hair, and sometimes her voice broke or became shrill and cracked as she strained it to reach the ears of those hundreds of men below her. She appealed to them to give fair play to women. She pleaded with them to vote against those men who had behaved to women with crooked injustice, with lies and treachery and revolting cruelty, because they were their



political opponents. She described the women of the labouring classes, their drudgery, their grey, grim lives, their struggle for the children's sake against all the terrors of poverty. "Those women," she said, "are your mothers and wives and daughters. Have they no rights? Have they no claim to speak their minds on questions which affect their work and wages and bodies and health and souls?"

By simple and direct language, by vivid word-pictures of the home life of working-women, by a swift survey of all that women suffer, and then by a sudden passionate outburst against all those brutal, cruel, savage, loose-living; hard-drinking, foul-mouthed, heavy-fisted men, who make so many women suffer, she stirred the emotions and the passions of the crowd, wedged tightly together nearest to the cart on which she stood. And suddenly, for one of those strange, unaccountable reasons which suddenly stir up the latent brutality of a crowd, there was an ugly murmur, rising to a deep and fierce roar, like that of wild beasts. Shrill shrieks of laughter from coarse women rang out, and from the outer circle of the crowd men were thrusting their way forward towards the cart. The tumult did not arise from those people nearest to the white-haired woman. It seemed to have its origin in that part of the crowd beyond the reach of her voice. People were fighting there, men and women together. Two women had grasped each other's hair and were tearing it out by handfuls and a small gang of young men—city clerks by the look of them—were shouting for an assault upon the suffragettes.

There is no reason to think that the scene that followed was in any way premeditated. It was caused suddenly, perhaps by a quarrel between two or three people, which, like a spark on dry wood, had inflamed the passion of the whole mob. Whatever the cause, it became clear that many individuals in the mob had suddenly conceived the idea of attacking the four women on the cart and that others were resisting them. There were twenty policemen below the cart, and with a long experience of crowds they seemed to guess the meaning of this sudden tumult. The sergeant spoke over his shoulder in an anxious voice:

"I advise you ladies to be careful. There's going to be some trouble."

The white-haired lady had ceased speaking. She was



looking down upon the seething mass of figures. The three other women were also standing. One of them stepped forward a little on the cart, so that the other woman was behind her. She bent down to speak to the policeman.

"Is there any real danger?" she said.

It was Mrs. Fraquet's voice, and the light from a street lamp fell upon Mrs. Fraquet's face and figure.

"I'm afraid there is, ma'am," said one of the policemen. "We will do our best. Now get off there. Get off, or I'll use my truncheon on you."

He shouted to three men who had got close to the cart and were trying to overthrow it, putting their shoulders to it, and lifting one of the wheels up. They were reinforced by twenty of the city youths, who plunged through the crowd with challenging shouts, mirthful but dangerous. The police fought with them. In less than a minute they were fighting against overpowering odds.

On the cart two of the women had crouched down. They were quiet and without panic, but white and trembling. The white-haired old lady was on her knees, grasping the edge of the cart which was jolting and jerking as a great mass of men struggled round it. Only Phillida Fraquet stood up. She stood, swaying a little from side to side, and sometimes almost losing her balance. But she held her head high, and her arms were stretched out to the crowd, and she was speaking to them. No one heard her voice. No one heard her words, calling upon the men not to shame themselves by attacking four defenceless women. But many men saw her standing there with the light of the street lamps shining upon her face, and some men, beyond the free fight near the cart, were asking, "Who is she? Who is that tall one? She is a beauty! She looks full of pluck."

And one man who saw her standing and swaying there, strove to get to her, to fight his way through to her, to thrust forward blindly and savagely through this turbulent mob. It was John le Dreux, who had been passing down Park Road on his way home, and who had heard the sudden angry murmur, had seen the sudden rush forward in the centre of the mob, and, far away from him, in the light of the street lamp, the face and figure of Phillida Fraquet. He knew then that her danger had come out of the darkness, suddenly and swiftly, as she said it would come. It was upon her now, and he was



like a madman to get to her. Some of the men recognised him. One of them sprang to his side.

"Come along, Doc', there ain't no blimy time to lose."

It was Bert Uggins, and with his clenched fist he knocked a man aside and thrust forward with his bullet head as a battering ram. John followed, shouting hoarsely, though he did not know what he shouted. The crowd cleared a little before him. Some women fell back with cries of fear. One man hit him a frightful blow on the shoulder. He strode over a boy who fell in front of him. And he was within five yards of Phillida Fraquet when she disappeared from the light of the street lamp into the darkness below. The police had been beaten, and with a loud shout of triumph, and with yells of delight, the city boys and the roughs from the slums around had thrown the cart over so that the wheels were uppermost. There followed a sudden silence—a curious silence after such wild noise, and a moment later some of those young men who had been the leaders in the assault slunk back into the crowd and disappeared. For although three of the women had jumped off the cart to safety, buffeted and pushed this way and that by hostile people, until their hostility had been suddenly forgotten in that curious silence, the fourth woman had fallen underneath the cart, and lay there very still, so still that a voice said:

"I think the woman is dead."

It was the voice, the clear, matter-of-fact voice of the police sergeant, which had frightened the leaders of the assault and sent them sneaking back into the crowd.

The tumult had ceased. Some of those people who had helped to overturn the cart now helped to drag it up again. And as it jerked back on its wheels with a creaking of iron axles and chains and shafts, John bent over the body of Mrs. Fraquet.

The police officer recognised him. "What's the verdict, doctor?" he asked quietly.

John lifted up his head. "Clear the crowd back," he said. "Get an ambulance—quick!"

He was very calm, very professional. He had his arm under Phillida's head. He listened to her heart. He raised her hand and felt her pulse. He pulled a phial from his pocket and put some drops upon her lips. She opened her eyes and looked at him. Her lips moved and he bent down



still closer and listened. He heard only one word. It was "Glad." Then her eyes closed and there was a short agony, and Phillida Fraquet died.

John followed her dead body as it was wheeled on a stretcher to the mortuary near the police station, and as the great crowd was pushed back by reinforcements of police—a crowd hushed and awed by the news of the woman's death—there were many people who spoke that night of the tall man with a white face and the hard, set mouth who paced with the long stride by the side of that stretcher, laden with the burden of a woman's body.

It was at that time—when the clocks of South London struck half-past eight—that Madge le Dreux reached Charing Cross station and looked for Raymond Fraquet's face among the people who were taking their tickets at the booking-office, and buying light literature at the book-stalls, and having their luggage labelled. Several of these people turned to look at the young girl with the handbag, and the dead white face, and the dark, scared eyes, who wandered about searching for someone she could not find. And one or two who watched her, having nothing else to do until it was time to take their seats, saw a tall man stride swiftly towards her and lift his hat, and saw the girl start back with a look of fright and then go faint so that the tall man had to grasp her by the arm. But no one heard the words that passed between these two or knew the meaning of that little drama which was taking place in a scene where many tragedies of life are begun, and sometimes ended.

It was Bertram Ordish who came up to Madge le Dreux.

As he lifted his hat, and as she started back with a little cry of surprise and fright, he said in his quiet voice:

"It is no use looking for Fraquet. He is not coming. He has asked me to come instead."

Madge was dazed. "Not coming?" she said. "Asked you to come?"

And then she went faint and he took hold of her arm and said:

"Steady; courage, little woman!"

He took her to a seat and made her sit down until the faintness passed.

"Tell me," she said. "Tell me. I do not understand."



There was a man in a fur coat and a silk hat tilted on one side sitting on the same seat. He turned round to stare curiously at the tall man and the young girl.

"I can't tell you here," said Ordish. "Let us go out somewhere. We must find a quiet place where we can talk."

He led her outside the station and into an Italian restaurant and to a quiet table in a quiet corner. A waiter came up flicking a table napkin.

"Two coffees," said Ordish in Italian. "We want to talk. You understand?"

The waiter understood perfectly. He understood that the English signor desired to say a few private words to the young lady who looked so ill. Ah, those little troubles! those little women!

He brought the coffees and retired to a discreet distance, satisfied that a man who spoke Italian so perfectly would be generous for a small service in the cause of love.

"Madge," said Ordish, "Fraquet has told me all about it. I know everything."

"Everything?" said Madge. A vivid flush of colour crept into her face. Then a look of fright crept into her eyes.

"What has happened?" she said breathlessly. "Is Raymond ill?"

She raised her eyes to Ordish, and opened them very wide, and stared at him as though she saw some sudden vision of horror.

"Is he dead?" she said in a whisper.

"He is quite well," said Ordish. "There's nothing the matter with him, except that he is a weak fellow with disordered nerves and a heart slightly out of gear."

He spoke sternly, scornfully, and then checked himself and spoke more gently, and told a plain story very simply. Raymond Fraquet had come round to him in a piteous state. He had told him all that had been arranged—about their meeting at Charing Cross, their flight to France, their beginning of a new life. And Ordish had listened very quietly, and had said:

"Well, go on, man, what then? Why do you come to me? Why do you put yourself into my hands when they itch to get about your throat?"

Then Raymond had thrown himself upon Ordish's mercy, upon his common sense, upon his friendship to Madge and Phillida and himself. He confessed that his wife's mode of life and her altered character had driven him to the verge of madness, so that he believed he hated her, and he confessed that he had sought comfort and sympathy from Madge so desperately and so passionately that he believed he loved her. But both things were false. It had come to him, with a clear, blinding light, that both things were false. He did not hate his wife. He loved her with a jealous, envious, yearning love. He had hated this work of hers, these perilous adventures of hers because they had taken her away from him, because they had separated them as with a sharp sword, because they had released her from her old allegiance to him, because they had changed his girl-wife, his beautiful Phillida into a woman of fighting instincts and political ideals. He had loved her so much that he had believed he hated her, and because he loved her, he could not do this thing with Madge.

"Those were his words," said Ordish. "Because I love Phillida I cannot do this thing with Madge."

Madge had covered her face with her hands. The Italian waiter, watching the scene from the corner of the restaurant, saw that the Englishman's words were hurting her. He thought the Englishman was too hard on the little lady. That was the way with Englishmen.

"I spoke some plain, straight words to him," said Bertram Ordish. "And I think I held up a bright mirror to his wretched little soul. However, the upshot of it is that he has gone down alone to a friend in Sussex for a week, instead of to Calais with you."

Madge took her hands down from her face and put them to her forehead.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, how he has shamed me!"

She seemed to be half suffocated with passionate grief and anger, and pulled at the lace round her throat as though she would tear it.

"Hush!" said Ordish. "By God's grace, everything has turned out for the best."

He leant over the table and took her hand.

"Madge," he said, "this is not the time to talk to you about myself. But perhaps now that this fellow—this thing has passed out of your life you may think differently



about what I said to you—down at the cottage—in the woods. Do you remember?"

Madge was crying now, and Ordish did not ask for an answer. He left that for the future, content to wait, and not without hope, and now he thought of something which might be a little awkward, a little damaging, to Madge.

"By the by," he said, "did you write to your brother Did you leave a letter for him? I rather understood so from Fraquet."

"Yes," said Madge, in a low voice.

"Ah!" said Ordish. "I think it would be well to get that letter back, and before old John has had time to read it and worry over it."

"Yes, yes," said Madge.

She was grateful to him for that.

So Bertram Ordish beckoned to the waiter and paid his little bill with a five-shilling piece, which was more than enough for two cups of coffee and a little conversation, and then he helped Madge into a taxicab, and drove with her quickly across the water to the street of flats.

Madge wept all the way home, and Ordish did not speak, but only clasped her hand and pressed it in a good, kindly way. Presently as they swerved round the corner of the park into "Intellectual Avenue" he put his head out of the cab, and said, "Stop!" And then saying, "Excuse, me a moment," to Madge in a strange voice, opened the door of the cab and got out and thrust his way through a little crowd in the street corner to where a newsboy was standing with his papers. On the way from Charing Cross he had caught several glimpses of newspaper placards. In the light of the street lamps he had read something about "Suffragist riot: lady killed." The words had interested him vaguely, but had not conveyed any definite meaning. But suddenly, as he looked out of the window of the motor cab the letters on the placards seemed to pierce his brain with a swift stab. He read them clearly in that one second as the cab passed. They were:

RAYMOND FRAQUET'S WIFE KILLED IN SUFFRAGE RIOT.

He bought the pink paper and read its headlines under a lamp-post, and then strode back to the cab with such a queer



look of fright and horror that Madge rose in her seat and said, "What is the matter?"

He blurted out the truth to her, and then in a kind of agony said:

"Phillida! Beautiful Phillida! Oh, my God, why did you let this happen?"

He was quite broken by the tragedy, and in the horror of it Madge forgot her own poor wounded heart, and thought only of the dead girl—for Phillida was not much more—who had given her life for her ideal. One other thought came to Madge and caused her to shrink back in her seat. It was the thought that but for some kind miracle she would have been travelling now with the husband of that girl who lay dead. Oh, kind miracle that had saved her from the last and worst horror!

So Madge got back the letter which lay untouched on the red blotting-pad in the flat to which John, her brother, had not yet returned, as he was keeping vigil through the night over the dead beauty of the woman he loved.

And so this story comes to an end, abruptly, and unfinished, as any story in real life. For there are no nicely rounded plots in life, and the true stories never end with the old fairy-tale words, "And so they lived happily ever afterwards." It would be easy to end with the sound of wedding bells, and to make Madge marry Bertram Ordish, according to his desire, and to make John marry Winifred Vernon, according to her desire, and to find a husband for Patsy, and to provide poor Raymond Fraquet with a lady more suited to his temperament. The trouble is that those happy events have not yet come to pass.

Only one other thing may be recorded by the chronicler of lives in "Intellectual Mansions," and that is the effect produced upon the nation by the death of Phillida Fraquet. The strife at the polls, the clamours of opposing parties, the election lies, the election dodges, the defeat of one side and the victory of the other, were soon forgotten, as a nightmare which it is good to forget; but the nation will not soon forget the shock with which it learnt the news of the first woman killed in the cause of Women's Suffrage. It was shocked out of its stupidity, out of its laughter at the tactics of these women, out of its jeers and scoffings. A leading article in the *Times* next morning pointed the moral of Phillida Fraquet's



death. "When women are ready to die for an ideal it must be taken seriously, it has a power beyond the mere force of political convictions. One woman has died, one woman has made the great sacrifice, and the time has come to acknowledge, before other martyrs are made, that the woman's claim must be granted.

John le Dreux reading those lines remembered what Phillida had said to him the last time they had met in her flat.

"I do not think I shall be asked for the sacrifice. But if so I shall be glad."

And he remembered the last word of all upon her lips when he bent down to listen to her dying breath. It was "Glad."



